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BY FORTUNE DU BOISGOBEY

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PART II.

BAIA'S ANCESTRY.



I.

IN WHICH THE FAITHFUL CASSONADE AT LAST REAPPEARS.

CASSONADE had been very busy throughout the eventful day on which his master had pursued the woman with the red flower over the roof of the house in the Rue Sainte Barbe. After the conversation with Casse-Cou on the evening before, he had at once set to work, making arrangements for the departure of the friends residing in the Rue Férou. Cambremer, on going away in the morning with Baïa, had given him various commissions, and among other things had told him to go to the bank for the money which was to be taken that evening to M. Gévaudan.

Moreover, Cassonade was desirous of seeing Pétronille, his wife, so as to inform her that he intended to open his grocery shop again during Chevalier Casse-Cou's absence. The laundress whom he had married about fifteen years before was a very hard-working woman, sincerely attached to her husband, but of a very trying disposition. She was easily put out, and as Cassonade was always disposed to joke, the result of this difference of temper was that they spent most of their time apart. Thanks to this judicious plan, they now agreed very well, and the husband was always glad to see his wife when they had not met for a couple of weeks or so.

It was Pétronille who had charge of the joint purse, and Cassonade never made a bargain without consulting her. Their conversation usually took place near the river beside the Pont St. Michel, where the good woman passed her time washing clothes in a boat, the linen being afterwards given to some assistants to iron. Having been brought up in the country, and being accustomed to this hard out-door labour, the able-bodied peasant-woman preferred the hardest part of a laundress's work, and was never weary of handling the beetle.

The squire set out from the Rue Férou at about noon, and as he was not in a hurry, he began by going to see Morillon. Since they had been in peril together, the coachman and the grocer had become fast friends, and Cassonade was anxious to inquire whether La Grise was able to work again, and also how the repairs of the yellow cabriolet were progressing.

He found Morillon engaged in doctoring the poor beast—it had been entirely disabled for two or three days—and he sincerely condoled with the driver on finding that the vehicle was in no better state than the mare, and that the wheelwright asked a very high price for repairing it. However, Cassonade greatly alleviated the poor cabman's sorrow by telling him that the chevalier would gladly pay the expenses.

Brightened up by this good news, Morillon thereupon offered the squire a glass of wine, which proved very acceptable, and which his good housewife, Jacqueline, poured out. She asked any number of questions about her "little Paul," whom she was longing to see, and they all had a great deal to say about the strange adventures in the vault.

Cassonade learned that the old house near by was still watched by the police, but that nothing suspicious had been discovered. The officials had made inquiries respecting the landlord's agent, but they had not found out anything whatever on the occasion of their visit to Montrouge, where he lived. The individual in question had left his home the day after Cambremer's rescue, and he had not reappeared, from which the magistrates had wisely concluded that he was an accomplice in Biroulas's nefarious practices. After fully talking over this mysterious affair, the two friends made up their minds not to part that day. A cabman without a cab can't do anything better than take a walk, and the grocer, in return for Morillon's hospitality, invited him to dinner.

"You must come to the bank with me," said he, after the first glass of wine. "From there we will go to find my wife at her wash-house, and when I have said a few words to her, we will go to take a bite at a wine-shop which I am acquainted with, and where the cook hasn't her equal for making rabbit stew."

"That suits me exactly," replied Morillon, "if you'll promise to accept a drink or two from me on the way back."

"Anything you like; but I must, in my turn, make one condition, which is that you won't drink a drop too much. This is not a day for that."

"Bah! is there something more in the wind? But never mind—don't be afraid! If any of these scamps fall into my hands, I've got a fist hard enough to make them dance like turkeys on hot gridirons."

"No, no, that won't be necessary; but I shall need you to-night till ten o'clock."

"Then it's a settled thing. Jacqueline, you must give La Grise an extra feed. The poor beast has fairly earned it, and needs it to regain her strength."

Having taken leave of the housewife, the two friends set out. Cassonade was delighted at having secured the company of the able-bodied cabman for the entire evening; for at nine he was obliged to go to the Rue de la Lune. His master had urged him to take the promised ten thousand francs to M. Gévaudan, and he did not wish to repair alone, with a large sum in his pocket, to a neighbourhood which he was beginning to consider a suspicious one.

Jacqueline's wine had put the two friends in a good humour; they trotted along, chatting gaily together, and stopped at a tavern or two which Morillon was in the habit of patronising.

Their heads could stand a glass or so, and they did not go beyond what Cassonade had advised, for they kept within the limits of mere joviality. However, they made themselves so agreeable at the various bars that they

did not get to the bank until a quarter of an hour before it closed, and Cassonade, after receiving the ten thousand francs, found that they would then scarcely have time to go to Pétronille's washing-place before night-fall. The spot which the laundress usually patronised, was the short arm of the Seine, below the Hôtel Dieu, and the walk was a long one from the Rue de la Vrillière, where the Bank of France is situated.

Morillon would willingly have indulged in a few more libations in honour of the god Bacchus, but the wise and ever-prudent Cassonade was anxious to keep his head clear for his interview with M. Gévaudan and so he induced his friend to restrain himself. They hurried along as fast as they could, but it was dusk when they reached the Pont Saint Michel, and almost all the washerwomen had already returned to the shore. Cassonade went down to the barge, and found that his wife had gone away.

"Old fellow," said he to the cabman, who was waiting for him at the foot of the bridge, "we have been too long in getting here, and Pétronille has gone off. We shall be obliged to go to her lodgings, for I must see her to-night."

"Where does your wife live?"

"In the Rue des Deux Ponts, at the corner of the quay. It is not far from here, and quite near the place where we shall dine."

"Let's be off, then. You must make me acquainted with your lady."

The Rue des Deux Ponts crosses the Ile Saint Louis from one end to the other, and the two friends had covered the whole distance in fifteen minutes. But, although they had gone so fast, the ever-flitting Pétronille had already left to take some clean clothes to customers.

Cassonade, although greatly vexed at having missed her, had no time to wait, and so he made up his mind to put off seeing her until the following day.

"Upon my word," said Morillon, "sorry as I am not to see your lady, I must admit that my heart is in my heels, and that a steak and onion sauce would pick me up wonderfully."

"All right, the 'Lapin qui Saute' is only two steps from here, and you'll confess that I was right about the cookery there."

"Will there be any bottled wine?" asked the cabman, who liked good Burgundy.

"Yes, there will," replied Cassonade, with the dignity of a host whose hospitality is called in question.

The establishment with the engaging sign which the grocer had just mentioned—the "Lapin qui Saute," which in English may be rendered as the rabbit in the pan—was situated in a small, narrow, dark street. It was a poor-looking place, but it was easy to find, for above the door there was the work of some neglected genius, who had depicted a rabbit cutting a lively little caper, while a cook made ready to receive it in her stew-pan. Behind the dusty window-panes there were some earthen-ware bowls filled with prunes, stewed in doubtful-looking juice, and some plates laden with eggs with the shells dyed red and piled up in pyramid form.

Cassonade pushed the door open, and entered the tavern with Morillon. A stout woman was taking a doze behind the counter, a bright metal affair covered with glasses and bottles.

"Wake up, mother Riffard; here are some customers!" called out the grocer in a merry tone.

The old woman started up and rubbed her eyes at once. "What! is it you, Monsieur Courapié? It is a long time since you came here," said she.

"That's true ; but to-night I intend to make up for lost time, for I've brought you a friend who has an excellent appetite. Give us the little room which overlooks the yard, and bring us two bottles of green seal to help us to wait for some stewed rabbit, some fried fish, and a steak."

"All right, all right!" said the tavern-keeper, descending from her throne more nimbly than would have appeared within the capabilities of so stout a woman ; "we've no one here, and you'll be quite by yourselves."

As she spoke, she opened the door of a little nook in which four persons could hardly have found comfortable accommodation. This unattractive spot was lighted by a smoky lamp and furnished with some wooden benches, and a table spotted with wine and grease ; however, Cassonade and his companion were not fastidious as to accessories, and providing that the food was plentiful, and that there was enough to drink, daintiness or even cleanliness did not matter to them. Madame Riffard duly served the wine as ordered by the grocer, who, as an old customer, was well acquainted with the contents of her cellar. She was then heard giving the order for dinner, and telling the cook to prepare the stewed rabbit in the best possible manner.

"Your health, old fellow !" said Cassonade, pouring out a full glass for his friend.

"Your health, and long life to your guv'nor, that worthy Monsieur Cambremer !"

The squire, pleased at this mark of respect to his master, was about to reply by praising Chevalier Casse-Cou to the skies, when the door of the tavern suddenly opened and three very noisy customers came in.

The new-comers knocked upon the counter so loudly that Cassonade put out his head to see who it could be that was in so great a hurry. They had their backs towards him, and he could not tell what their appearance was, except by their apparel. The result of his examination of the three noisy carousers who had thus appeared was far from satisfactory. They all wore shabby hats, and carried thick sticks in their hands. They looked as though they might belong to a band of highway-robbers, and had donned attire suitable for making a raid.

Cassonade was not wanting in judgment, nor unaccustomed to the sight of the low classes of the city of Paris. However, he at first thought that these fellows all belonged to the detective force, and, although he had nothing on his conscience, he was not fond of meeting any men from the Rue de Jérusalem. The annoyances that his master and Paul Vernier had had with the commissary in whose service he, himself, had formerly been, had put him on his guard as to everybody belonging to the police administration, and his first impulse was to draw back his head and conceal himself.

He made a sign to Morillon to be quiet, closed the glass door which parted the main room from the little nook where Madame Riffard had placed them, and began to listen to what was being said.

"Come now, old lady," exclaimed one of the carousers, "your brandy has been baptized."

"What kind of talk is that?" said the landlady. "Why, you couldn't find a drop of water in the whole house !"

"That's true," muttered Morillon, "you can see that by the table-cloth."

Cassonade put his finger to his lips and looked about him to study the topography of the little room. The nook had but one window, opening

upon an inner yard, but it had two doors, the one by which the two friends had entered, and another leading to Madame Riffard's private apartments. In case of an intrusion it was possible to retreat, and this might have its importance at a later moment.

The noise at the counter continued ; everything showed that there was a probability of the new-comers indulging in hard drinking, and Cassonade instinctively fancied that he might hear something that would be of service to him. Since his late adventures, the good squire had had his head full of suspicious resemblances and mysterious analogies which he constantly thought he discovered between Biroulas's confederates and everybody he came across. His mind was always on the alert respecting the schemes of Chevalier Casse-Cou, and he noted every detail and incident, however seemingly unimportant it might be. He now got up softly, and went to the door, in the rear of the private room, after whispering to his friend to keep quiet. He knew his way about the house, and easily found the kitchen where Madame Riffard's only assistant was busy at the stove.

"Do you know those fellows who are making such a noise in the shop ?" said he, in a low tone, to the culinary artist.

"Not very well, upon my word !" replied the turn-spit, who professed to have great esteem for the more select customers ; "there's one chap among 'em who has been here several times before, but I've never seen the others."

"What do you take those chaps to be, then ?"

"They are vagrants, I'm sure of it, and I shouldn't like to meet them on the quay at night-time. In a lonely place they would chuck a man into the water, and there would be nobody about there to look out of a window and see what they were up to."

"Do you think they are going to make a stay of it, in there ?"

"Oh, yes ; I fancy they'll make a night of it, for they've ordered a good deal of rum, and Madame Riffard is going to serve them in the little private room next to yours."

Cassonade thought for a moment. "Can you serve us our dinner without going through the shop ?" said he, in a low tone.

"Of course I can ; I need only go in by the little door."

"Well, then, tell Madame Riffard that I don't wish to be seen, but that I want to hear what is being said by those chaps through the partition."

"What ! do you belong to the police ?" exclaimed the cook, convinced that Cassonade must belong to the detective brigade.

"That's my affair, my good fellow," said the grocer, not sorry to turn to account the respect which all the persons engaged in taverns profess for the police. "Try to keep as quiet as a fish, and see what you can see ; I'll oil your fingers for you as I go out."

This authoritative language made a deep impression upon the cook, and Cassonade returned to the little room with the certainty that his orders would be properly attended to. Morillon was impatiently waiting for him, and there was some excuse for his impatience, for he was hungry, and felt puzzled by the stealthy manœuvres which his friend was indulging in. He understood that he wished to keep an eye upon the carousers in the other room, but he could not imagine why. "They are in there," he whispered, pointing to the boarding which separated the two rooms.

Cassonade immediately began to look for a crack between the boards, and had no trouble in finding one. He at once applied his eye to the slit, and was rewarded for his pains by seeing the three unknown men seated at table

and swallowing Madame Riffard's liquor in copious draughts. The light of the lamp which was fastened to the wall fell full in their faces, but, although Cassonade looked closely, he did not remember having seen them before.

Finding that their countenances were unfamiliar, he now attempted to find out something about them by listening. The carousers were talking together, and he heard all that they said, but he was not much better off than before.

They said a word or two every now and then but more frequently indulged in swearing and laughing. It was a council of drunkards, the intercourse being made up of broken sentences, incoherent exclamations, and frequent hiccupping.

After listening a few moments, however, Cassonade detected a meaning in this cross-fire of rough language. The fellows were talking about one of themselves whom they had left outside, and who would almost catch his death with the cold, so they said, while waiting for them to go for him. Moreover, they mentioned something which they meant to do, and which would bring them in a great deal of money, and they alluded to a man whom they wished to get rid of at once.

This was enough to make Cassonade believe that a real crime was afoot, and as he had a habit of supposing that everything had some reference to his master, he surmised that he had chanced to come across some of the implacable enemies of Chevalier Casse-Cou. However, the situation was not yet clear enough for him to make up his mind as to what to do, and he preferred to wait until he heard more.

The men in the next room did not seem to be at all disposed to leave the place. They had begun to sing a drinking song of which they bawled the chorus, at the top of their voices, making every pane of glass in the tavern shake. The cook had now served some stewed rabbit to the driver and his friend. He had come in on tip-toe, and had placed the dish before them with every possible precaution against making a noise, then retiring as silently and as solemnly as a seraglio mute.

Cassonade made a gesture to his friend Morillon to do honour to the feast, and the cabman made signs meaning that he did not wish to eat by himself. After this lively and animated pantomime, however, he attacked the dish for which the tavern was noted, and it was laughable beyond words to see him endeavour to use his fork in such a way as not to let it make a clatter by coming in contact with his plate.

The squire was too busy with his reflections to keep him company. He only drank a sip or two of Madame Riffard's burgundy, from time to time. His attention was fixed upon the noise resounding in the next room. The singing went on, but there was a stir at the same time, and Cassonade, seeing that one of the carousers was making ready to leave, conjectured that he was going after the other fellow who had remained in the street.

A few moments later, indeed, a man came in by himself. "You're a pretty set, ain't you?" said he; "do you think it's warm out there on the quay?"

"What ails you? ain't your turn over now? Come, sit down and swallow a glass of the 'fiery' to warm yourself," said one of his comrades.

"Are there many people going by, over there?" asked a third.

"Not many; two or three idlers now and then. But there's still a light on the other side of the water, on the Ile Louviers."

"Some fellows unloading wood; they won't be long at it,"

"Never mind ; it's better to wait an hour longer before we chuck our chap into the water."

"Is he quiet ?"

"Oh ! as quiet as a saint's statue ; if he didn't gasp from time to time, I should believe that he had passed his gun over to the left shoulder."

"He'll wake up when we give him his bath."

This remark was greeted by a shout of laughter from one and all, which chilled Cassonade's heart. There was no further room for doubt, the men near-by were thorough villains, and intended to commit an atrocious crime.

There was nothing to show, however, that their victim had anything in common with any one of the dwellers in the Rue Férou, but the squire was not a man to allow even a stranger to be murdered without trying to prevent it. However, the singing, which now became more riotous than ever, drowned the voices of the speakers, and there was nothing more to be learned by listening. Accordingly, Cassonade got up quietly, and said in a low tone to Morillon : "Wait for me here and come to look for me if I don't return in ten minutes."

"Look for you ? Where ?" said the cab-driver.

"On the Quai d'Anjou. And, above all, no noise."

And thereupon the squire slipped out by the door leading to the kitchen, leaving Morillon to sigh : "So I shall be obliged to eat all the stewed rabbit myself !"

The difficulty in Cassonade's way was to go off and return without being seen ; for, however drunk the carousers might be, they would surely suspect something from his coming and going, should they encounter him on their way. Fortunately, the arrangements of the establishment were well adapted to enable a person to steal in and out quietly. The common room of the tavern communicated with the street, but the private rooms overlooked an interior courtyard, and at the foot of the staircase which led to the first floor, there was a door which opened in such a way as to lead almost straight on to the quay.

Cassonade slipped noiselessly towards this exit, which conducted to an open court filled with empty casks and boxes. The entrance of this court, open for the admission of the drays which brought different goods for the persons who followed trades of various kinds in the house, was soon reached by the grocer who placed himself close to one of the jambs of the doorway, and stealthily popped out his head.

The quay was very dimly lighted by two or three lamps placed at long intervals apart, and hanging twenty feet above the pavement. By the doubtful gleam of these miserable lamps, which were all that the city then supplied, Cassonade discerned a long line of houses, stretching right and left, and facing the Seine. Before him there was a parapet, breast-high, below which the dull murmur of the water was faintly audible.

The river, swollen by the winter rains, had but a narrow bed at this point, and was almost a torrent. Its splashing was the only sound that broke upon the deep silence. Not a window with a light in it was to be seen, and the shops, if any were to be found in this deserted corner of old Paris, had been closed since sunset. Not even were there any coach-lamps to be seen speeding along like shooting-stars, for at nightfall all traffic ceased on the island known as the Ile Saint Louis.

Never was place or time more favourable for a crime, and if the carousers in the tavern meditated any iniquitous act, they need not long delay its accomplishment.

The almost terrific quietude of this solitary quay made Cassonade reflect. He said to himself that he could not expect any help from passers-by, and that the quiet, silent houses would not awaken on hearing the noise of a night attack. If the adventure took a tragic turn, he could only rely on help from his friend Morillon. The Jehu's arm was certainly a strong one, and he was a very devoted friend; but in the battle which might take place at any moment the reserve force would be too far off from the vanguard to be of prompt avail as a reinforcement.

Had Cassonade been a different kind of man, he would, perhaps, have drawn back; but since he had been raised to the rank of squire to Chevalier Casse-Cou, Pétronille's husband was no longer afraid of anything. Temerity is also as contagious as fear, and Cambremer's adventurous disposition had exercised great influence upon the peaceful grocer of the Rue Férou. He now sought the most unheard-of adventures with the same ardour that he had formerly displayed in selling provisions, and the prospect of a struggle in which he might, perhaps, lose his life did not frighten him any more than dealing in his raisins and candles.

Accordingly, he did not hesitate to leave the yard, where he had found a temporary hiding-place. He started out to look about him with the firm resolution of finding the foes and overtaking them, reserving the right to draw back should the contest become too unequal. The question was to find out whether the roysterer had turned to the right or the left when he left the tavern. Cassonade saw no one on either side, but he had already had a certain amount of practice as a knight-errant, and he wisely concluded that the rascal had probably betaken him to the loneliest part of the neighbourhood.

He therefore turned to the right, directing his steps towards the eastern point of the island. He went along close to the houses, and stopped every second moment to look and listen. At first he saw and heard absolutely nothing; but after proceeding some fifty paces, he espied a coach standing at the edge of the sidewalk.

Under any other circumstances this discovery would not have seemed strange. A vehicle in front of a door may be seen every day and night in a thousand streets of Paris, but Cassonade recalled every word of the conversation which he had just heard, and the motionless coach seemed to him a very conspicuous object.

This was a reason the more for acting prudently, and the squire made his plans with the cunning of an able strategist. The vehicle stood against the parapet of the quay, on the side opposite to that on which he found himself. He took good care not to emerge from the projecting shadows of the houses but continued walking on, bending down and profiting by all the doorway recesses to hide himself the better.

After a few minutes of this skilful manœuvring, he caught sight of a man who was standing beside the mysterious vehicle.

"That's one of the scoundrels from the tavern who has come here to keep guard," said Cassonade to himself, without for a moment entertaining the much more natural idea that the individual in question was simply the driver of the vehicle watching his horses. However, his instinctive feelings served him marvellously well in this case, for, as soon as he came near enough, he saw that the watcher was indeed one of the men whom he had seen in the tavern. The scamp was pacing up and down the sidewalk, like a policeman on his beat, trying to warm himself, and every now and then he flourished his stick angrily in the air.

Cassonade thereupon went on a few steps further, and chose a safe post for observation afforded by the deep opening of an alley. Once in this nook, the grocer, whom nature had not afflicted with any superfluous fat, was not visible beyond the wall, but seemed a part of it, and could watch without been seen. He had not been there ten minutes when he heard a grumble.

"Thunder!" growled the sentinel, "thunder and blazes! What beastly work this is! what infernal weather!"

It was not very hard to guess the cause of the anger to which he was thus giving way. The ruffian charged with watching the vehicle was regretting the pleasures of Madame Riffard's tavern, and cursing the duty that obliged him to pace the muddy pavement of the Quai d'Anjou.

Matters were now growing sufficiently comprehensible, and Cassonade could no longer doubt but what the victim destined to be thrown into the Seine was shut up in the waiting vehicle. Now, the worthy grocer was fully determined not to allow such an abominable crime to be committed, but the question was, how could he deliver the prisoner? He had no weapons, enabling him to make an onslaught, and the ten thousand francs which he had carried about him would not prove a sufficient buckler to guarantee his breast from a stab with a knife. Without counting the staff which he handled with perfect ease, the ruffian was undoubtedly provided with the usual accessories of his calling, that is to say, a knife, and a brace of pistols. He had broad shoulders, also, and Cassonade was too slight to indulge in any hope that, in the event of a struggle, the good cause would prove triumphant.

The squire was certainly brave, and the prospect of battle did not frighten him, but it was desirable to have some chance of success. He would not help the poor fellow whom he wished to deliver, by getting himself knocked down or stabbed. It would be better to wait for the arrival of some belated passer-by, and Cassonade at first resolved to do so. But no footsteps, even afar, broke upon the silence of the night, and it was to be feared that the time would pass by without any help arriving. Besides, the passer-by might be a woman or a drunkard, or some pusillanimous party, and in that case the man on the watch could not be attacked.

To call out, to shout in such a way as to rouse the people residing in the closed houses around would, as the squire wisely concluded, be utterly useless. Besides, even admitting that the neighbours came to the windows when an outcry was raised, the rascal who was watching the carriage would have ample time to mount upon the box, whip up his horses, and disappear with his prisoner. On the other hand, each moment that elapsed brought the frightful catastrophe nearer. The night was passing away, the hour was becoming more and more favourable, and the gang in the tavern might at any moment appear.

Cassonade would then have no choice but a mad struggle with four men, and he must experience horrible suffering at seeing a crime perpetrated without being able to prevent it. In this perplexity, he took the only reasonable course, which was to return to Madame Riffard's tavern in search of Morillon. The cab-driver was not a man to shrink from danger, and, besides, he was powerful enough in frame to render his friend some valuable assistance. "We two together," said Cassonade to himself, "could conquer this scamp."

That was all very well; but the question was to be in time. So he at once began a retreat, and stepped back again, still close to the houses, just

as he had come. The man with the bludgeon was in the meanwhile swearing and pacing up and down the opposite side-walk. Cassonade looked at the vehicle as he went off, and saw that it was drawn by two powerful horses which did not look at all like the half-starved animals harnessed to most hackney-coaches.

His return was effected in safety, and he did not meet with anyone while gliding by the private entrance into Madame Riflard's establishment. He found Morillon absorbed in the melancholy contemplation of some fried fish, which had replaced the stewed rabbit on the greasy table. There was some abominable rioting going on in the next room, and it was evident that the affair was becoming an orgy.

"Get up quietly, and come with me," whispered Cassonade in his companion's ear.

There was no danger that the rioters would hear him, for they were shouting as loud as they could, and it seemed that they would end by falling under the table. Morillon gave a regretful glance at the half-empty bottle, but he obeyed his friend with the mute impassibility of a soldier on hearing his corporal's orders.

"What time is it?" at this moment asked one of the drunken ruffians in the neighbouring private room.

"What does it matter to you?" replied another.

"Well, there's the job to do."

"Well, that'll be done when the bottle's empty."

"All right; but no shirking," said the third, in a tone of authority. "In ten minutes we must be on the spot. Pavard is all alone there, and there's no knowing what might happen. Besides, you know that the old 'un won't stand any nonsense."

This edifying talk, of which the two friends had not lost a word, was well calculated to make Cassonade hurry. He left the room on tiptoe, and Morillon did all that he could to imitate the prudent gait of his leader. The courtyard was crossed at once, and on reaching the doorway the squire halted. He did not wish to engage in the hazardous undertaking before him, without talking for a moment to his ally. However, before he could say a word, Morillon spoke up and said: "Will you be good enough to tell me what sense there is in going about in such weather as this? Upon my word, anyone would think that your pate had a crack in it. There's the fried fish getting cold! I don't want to complain, but you really have a strange way of showing politeness to your friends when you invite them to dinner!"

"Hold your tongue!" said Cassonade, curtly. "This is no time to laugh and talk about fried fish. You wouldn't let those rascals kill a man without trying to prevent it, would you?"

"Kill a man! Where?"

"Why, a hundred steps from here. He is shut up in a vehicle, and you heard what they said in the room just now."

"I heard them, but I couldn't understand what they were saying very well."

"Well, I understood it if you didn't. There is one of them on the watch near the carriage. In a quarter of an hour the others will join him and help him to throw their prisoner into the river."

"Oho! no, they won't! I won't let them!"

"Neither will I; but we must make haste; for if we delay a moment we shall have the whole gang out here after us"

"That's certain ; and it would be better to take hold of the fellow who is on the watch while he's all by himself."

"Then let us run quietly along by the wall, and when we are close to the carriage, we had better go right up to the man and then both of us attack him at once."

"What if he shouts?"

"We'll shut up his mouth by knocking him down," replied Cassonade, who was ready for anything.

"Humph! I haven't much confidence in that plan. We can't prevent him from shouting for help, no matter how quickly we may knock him over."

"Bah! everybody has gone to bed, and old Mother Riffard's tavern is too far off for the rest to hear him call."

"Who knows? Those villains always have whistles in their pockets, and a whistle can be heard for a mile and a half or more."

"The deuce they have!" said Cassonade, scratching his forehead ; "you may be right in that. But what are we to do?"

"It would take a smart fellow to tell us that," muttered the cab-driver.

"Well, we've no time to cudgel our brains, for we have not more than ten minutes before us, altogether."

This short dialogue was followed by a spell of silence.

The two friends were reflecting, and could not think of an acceptable plan. "Are there any horses to the carriage?" asked Morillon, at last.

"Of course there are. Did you think that they pulled the trap along with their hands? There are two horses, and they seem to me to be fine ones, too."

"And you say that the man on the watch is on foot?"

"Yes; he keeps kicking his heels upon the sidewalk, but he doesn't stir from before the trap."

"That's famous! I've an idea!"

"What is it?"

"Never mind; you couldn't help me. But listen to what I am going to tell you."

The parts had changed, and Cassonade was somewhat surprised to hear his friend assume the direction of the engagement which was now about to take place. However, the cab-driver spoke so authoritatively that he speedily subjugated the ex-grocer.

"Speak quickly!" exclaimed the latter.

"We must begin by separating."

"You must be crazy! that would only end in our being pummelled separately."

"Don't be afraid; I'll come up at the right moment. It's agreed; I'll go along by the wall until I'm in front of the trap. You must remain here, and as soon as you see me there, you must cross the quay, and come quietly up, like a man who has just left a café, and is going home to his wife."

"But the scamp will see me."

"That is just what I want. He will take you for a passer-by like any one else, and he won't say anything to you, but you must talk to him."

"What the mischief shall I say to him?"

"Anything at all that comes into your head. If you can only keep him talking to you for a moment, all will go well." Thereupon, without waiting for a reply, Morillon began to walk along as cautiously as his friend had done.

Cassonade thought that he intended to wheel round and attack the guardian of the vehicle from behind. This plan was as good as any, for it was all-important to act with promptness. Accordingly, he waited until Morillon had reached his post, and then with three strides he crossed to the opposite sidewalk, after which he proceeded towards the carriage, singing and reeling from side to side, as if he were intoxicated. The scamp on the watch turned his head quickly, looked, and took a step towards the intruder who was coming to disturb him. Thirty seconds later, the adversaries were face to face.

"Excuse me, 'scuse me," said Cassonade, who was playing his part as a drunkard very well; "but will you be—be kind 'nough to tell me where's the Place Maubert?"

"I don't know," growled the sentinel; "go on your way, you old bibber!"

"Well, that's p'lte! Why won't you tell me where that old Place Maubert is? Shall I have to treat you? Come on, I'll do it; give me your arm, and come on to the wine-shop, for I'm full, you see." Whilst stammering out these words, Cassonade took hold of the fellow's button-hole.

"Down with your paws! thunder and lightning!" said the scamp, trying to shake him off.

"Hold on, Pavard! we're coming! we're coming to help you!" called out some tipsy voices in the distance.

All was lost! The gang was coming to the rescue! This was a bitter disappointment for the poor squire; this disastrous interference came at the very moment when he had fancied that Morillon was about to fall into line. He felt as Napoleon must have felt at Waterloo when, instead of Grouchy, whom he was expecting, he saw Blucher appear. However, this was no time for Cassonade to lose his head, and he said to himself that he had better keep on playing his part as a drunkard. Thanks to this bit of acting, he hoped to be able to deceive the fellows who were coming up.

"They won't want to pick a quarrel," thought he; "and they'll let me go on. Morillon can see all this from the corner where he's hidden, and he'll be smart enough to keep quiet. I shall go on my way, but I shall take care to knock against the wall, and kick up the devil of a row. If I succeed in bringing anybody on the scene, I shall be able to prevent the rascals from dispatching their prisoner."

Feeling sure that he was right, he once more caught hold of the man with the bludgeon.

"I tell you that we must take a glass together," he howled, "a good big glass! I'll pay for it; but you can stand treat as well, if you like."

"Let me go, you fool!" replied the ruffian, pushing Cassonade roughly back.

However, the squire held fast, and clutched so tightly at the long overcoat which the man wore that the owner of the garment was dragged four or five paces from the vehicle. His confederates who had hailed him from afar, so as to let him know that they were coming, were not hastening very fast; first, because they had been drinking too much to be able to walk straight, and, secondly, because they did not believe their associate to be in any great danger.

"Ah! you've made me mad at last!" said the scoundrel, angrily. And disengaging himself with a well applied blow, he nailed Cassonade against the parapet. The parts were now changed, and it was the poor squire's turn to be seized by the collar.

In the new position assumed by the antagonists, the man with the bludgeon had his back to the vehicle, while the grocer was facing it. The other rascals were now but three paces off, and were laughing heartily at the spectacle presented to their view.

At the moment when Cassonade was beginning to choke, he thought that he saw some one cross the quay rapidly. Almost at the same moment one of the ruffians gave the alarm to the others, uttering a frightful oath as he did so. The grocer's conqueror turned round at the sound, let go of his victim, and rushed towards the coach which he had been imprudent enough to leave.

Cassonade drew a long breath, opened his eyes, and beheld a most unexpected sight.

A man who had emerged from a doorway had reached the vehicle, and setting foot upon the forward wheel, on the side near the pavement, had landed on the coach-box with one bound.

"Knock him down! Break his head with your stick," howled the other ruffians, rushing to the help of their sentinel, [who had gone up to the vehicle from the opposite side.

It is needless to say that the squire had recognised Morillon in the person who had climbed on to the box, and that his heart beat fast at this providential apparition. He would have been glad to call out to the daring ally who had been so prompt, but his voice died away in his throat, and he could not utter a sound. It was as well for him that he was not able to express his joy, for the end of the adventure showed that silence was the wisest course.

"Keep up, Pavard, hold on! here we are!" shouted the gang, who had run past Cassonade and were already near the back of the carriage.

The moment was a critical one, and the success of the bold move attempted by Morillon depended upon his promptness. However, a man does not drive a mare like *La Grise* about Paris for ten years without being a good *Jehu*, and the owner of the yellow cabriolet manœuvred so boldly that his triumph was complete. He had seized the reins in his left hand, taken the whip in his right, and the two horses already felt that pulling of the bit which told them that they had to deal with a man who knew what he was about.

As soon as Morillon had his horses well in hand, he gave the scoundrel, who was trying to clutch hold of his leg, such a kick that he made him reel back. At the same time he dexterously whipped up the horse on the right hand and was off like lightning. The rascals who saw their prey escape them howled with rage. A faint sigh of relief uttered by Cassonade replied to their clamour. Fortunately, this mark of sympathy was lost in the tumult which followed upon the victory of the intrepid Morillon. The success of the operation was not, however, absolutely complete, for the rascal who had been kicked full in the breast had risen up, and had succeeded in catching on to the back of the coach.

"Hold on, Pavard!" called out the rest of the gang who attempted to run after the carriage, but were soon distanced.

Morillon had naturally let his horses go straight ahead, but from the spot where this furious rush began to the point of the island there were only about two hundred steps. Beyond the firm ground there was a wooden bridge communicating with the *Ile Louviers*—which has now disappeared—and this bridge, the *Pont Rouge*, was only open to foot passengers. Cassonade, who was aware of it, trembled lest his friend should run

against the bridge, but he was soon relieved on seeing the vehicle make a masterly sweep and turn the wall of the last house which stood out between the two quays like a cape.

Unfortunately, the terrible Pavard had not stirred from the place where he had installed himself after the fashion of a schoolboy when the latter wishes to get a ride for nothing to the utter despair of some driver. Clutching with one hand to the edge of the round hole which opened at the back of the carriage, like an eye, and with his legs twisted amid the springs, the scoundrel was being dragged along at the utmost speed, and he resisted all the jolting of the vehicle. He clung on like a jaguar which has leapt upon a stag's back, and tears and bites the poor animal in its flight.

The vehicle disappeared as swiftly as some vanishing dream. Flying along like the wind it went off by the Quai de Béthune. It could be heard rolling on like distant thunder, and the sharp cracking of Morillon's whip sounded like pistol-shots amid the prolonged rumble.

"Baluchon, you've got good legs; go on, cut short by the Rue Poultier; you will catch them that way on the quay!"

The rascal whom the leader thus addressed did not need to be told twice, but darted into the short by-street, as he was bidden. However, the other two ruffians had not stirred, and were close to the unfortunate Cassonade.

The triumphant Morillon's friend had remained leaning against the parapet, full of mingled joy and anxiety. He mentally thanked Providence for favouring the cab-driver's daring undertaking, but he wondered what would now be his own fate, abandoned as he was to the vengeance of the scoundrels beside him.

"The devil take it!" shouted the villain whom the gang seemed to obey; "we're in a nice fix now! If Baluchon doesn't catch the carriage, our affair is settled; the old boy will give us the sack."

"Thunder and lightning!" replied his companion, roughly shaking Pétronille's husband, "this one shall pay for the other!"

Cassonade realised that he must be daring, and continue speaking and acting like a drunken man.

"Don't shake a fellow like that, I say!" he muttered, seeming to hesitate and stammer, like a man who does not know what he is saying; "it's no reason why, because a fellow has taken a little drop—a little drop too much—that's no reason, I say, to push him about like that."

"What were you doing there on the side-walk, eh? You were spying upon us!"

"Spying? Oh, no! I hate spies, so I do. I was coming from the 'Veau qui Te te,' where I'd been dining with—with some friends—and there was some wine—Beaujolais wine—so heady that if you only drank three bottles of it they would put you right under—right under the table."

"That's all stuff that you're telling us! What were you jabbering away with Pavard for?"

"Pavard? Who's Pavard? Don't know him at all."

This conversation was interrupted by the return of the individual who answered to the attractive name of Baluchon. He came back both breathless and enraged, and muttered: "No go! I got to the Quai de Béthune, just as the rumbler passed—"

"Why didn't you run after it?"

"After the old boy's horses? I might as well have tried to play the guitar on a trumpet."

"Well, where's Pavard?"

"Oh! he's holding on all right."

Cassonade did not lose a word of all this, although he was pretending to stagger, and he noted down each word in his memory.

"That will do now," said the leader, philosophically; "if he does not slip off on the way, we shall know where the cage and the bird have gone to."

"But where the something did he come from, that chap who leaped on to the box like a cat?"

"I don't know; but as we've got one fellow, we mustn't let him go."

"What good will that do us?"

"Who knows? We shall see."

The latter part of this conversation was carried on in a low tone; but, although Cassonade heard only a portion of their talk, he realised that these fellows were deliberating as to what they should do with him. He longed to escape from the consequences of the adventure by taking to his heels; but he lacked the swiftness of limb of the horses which had saved Morillon; and he had no chance of being able to contend with the three men, the weakest of whom would have been able to knock him over with one blow. Cunning alone could save him.

"I say now, my friends," he said, "ain't one of you willing to take me home? I see everything double," added the poor squire.

"We'll see about that presently; meantime, come this way a little," said the leader of the gang, dragging him towards some steps which led from the quay down to the river bank. "We can talk better on the edge of the water, and that'll wake you up," he added, with a sneering laugh which was far from encouraging.

Cassonade was strongly inclined to shout out, so as to attract everybody to the windows; but the houses seemed quieter than ever, and, besides, this would have been a hazardous attempt. In order to play his part naturally, the false drunkard was obliged to hold his tongue, for when a man has been drinking he doesn't call for help if he is being pulled about a little. On the other hand, he did not care to repair to the lonely shore, for he guessed only too well the evil intentions of the ruffians who wished to take him there.

In his perplexity he chose a medium course, and began to argue again, gradually raising his voice, so that he might be overheard if by chance any one passed by. "Water!" he exclaimed, "who is such a ninny as to talk about water here? I'm willing to take a drink or so, but if you want me to swallow a glass of the Seine water—why, I—I'd rather be—be excused."

As he spoke these words, Cassonade kept his eyes and ears on the alert, but the noise he made was vain, and he mentally began to curse this neighbourhood where nothing stirred after eight in the evening. Like Sister Anne, in the story of "Blue Beard," the unfortunate grocer saw nothing coming, and the adventure was decidedly turning out badly for him. However, his persistence in feigning drunkenness was partially rewarded, for it brought him support where he did not look for it. Baluchon, the nimble scamp who had run after the carriage and who had returned from his fruitless attempt to catch it up, was of a lively disposition; and being a jolly sort of scoundrel, he was inclined to employ mild measures. He pulled the leader of the gang on one side by his coat-tail, and made a sign that he wished to speak to him.

"Master," said he, when he had him in a corner, "I think that we are

losing our time with that fellow over there. We should do much better to let him go, and try and find Pavard."

"Let him go? Why, he'd go after the other one. What an idea!"

"Bah! they don't know each other; and it isn't worth our while to have another bad job on our hands. We shall have trouble enough to get out of the other matter as it is."

The leader reflected, and seemed to hesitate. He glanced askance at Cassonade, who was leaning against the parapet with the tranquil indifference of a man who has left his wits at the bottom of his glass. "If I was only sure," he muttered, "that he was not hand in hand with the rascal who played us that trick—"

"How could they have been in the thing together, when this one was staggering along the quay, and the other was hiding in a door-way?"

"That proves nothing; they may have arranged it all beforehand, and whatever you may say, it's mighty queer that a man should jump on to the coach-box just at the very moment when Pavard was being held by the collar."

"Listen! 'tain't because I want to save that fellow's skin; but I don't like trouble that doesn't bring anything. It didn't suit me very well to meddle in getting that chap in the carriage out of the way, and yet the old boy pays cash down; but, as that affair's all spoilt, I don't want to have another matter on my conscience."

"Your conscience! That's all stuff! Dead people are the only ones that don't talk."

"But live ones only tell what they know; and this fellow doesn't know anything, for he's drunk enough for ten men."

"I'm not so sure of that; and when it's necessary I can pretend to be drunker than he is."

There was a spell of silence which Cassonade thought very long, for he had not heard what was said, although he knew very well that the men had been talking about him.

"Come now," at last said Baluchon, who did not care to break certain laws of the penal code unnecessarily, "I have an idea, and I think it's better than yours."

"Out with it, then!"

"Well, you see, I'll look as though I believed him, and, as he asked the way to the Place Maubert, I'll just tell him that we'll take him home, and we'll go to his door. We shall soon see whether he's been telling us a lie or not, without counting that we shall find out his name, and can keep an eye on him to-morrow."

If Baluchon expected to be praised for this idea, he was cruelly deceived in his hopes, for the leader replied, shrugging his shoulders: "You must be a perfect fool! It doesn't take much to guess that if this fellow knows who was in the carriage, the first thing he'll do will be to have us arrested, supposing we go along with him."

"Arrested by whom?"

"By the first people we meet, you idiot! Do you think that it's the same on the other side of the water as it is here, where folks go to bed with the chickens?"

"That may be true; yes, that may be true," replied Baluchon, scratching his head; "but what if we pretend to let him go and follow him on the sly?"

The leader of the gang reflected once more. "Yes," he muttered, after

pondering awhile, "we might find out in that way where he's going to, without running any risk ourselves; but he must not know what we're up to. You must begin by slipping off quietly; go along the Rue Poultier, and stand at the corner of the quay. He'll turn off at the end of the island, and when he passes before you, you must follow him up smartly, without seeming to do so. Don't miss him, as you did the carriage, that's all."

"How do you know he'll go that way?"

"What other way can he go? He won't go back towards the Cité, as he has come from there; if he goes off by the Pont Rouge, that will be a sign that he's been fooling us, and then we can catch him up before he has gone across the Ile Louviers."

"You're right; I'll start off at once," said Baluchon, going stealthily away.

Cassonade was only too glad to find that the conversation which was about to decide his fate was at an end, but he succeeded in hiding his satisfaction when the head of the gang called out to him: "Go your way, you old guzzler; we've had enough of you!"

The ex-grocer then succeeded in replying in a drunken drawl: "Then you won't treat me to a glass of something—on—on the Place Maubert?"

"Be off with you, I tell you! We want to talk about our own affairs."

This time Cassonade did not wait to be told again. He began walking with intentional slowness, and staggering along the sidewalk, muttering: "The Place Maubert must be over here, somewhere."

He took good care not to return to the "Lapin qui-Saute," but went on towards the bridge called the Pont Rouge, thus unwittingly acting as had been predicted to Baluchon. He staggered more and more, and carried his imitation of drunkenness so far as to stop short two or three times as though his legs refused to move. However, when he was near the bridge, he again stopped as though he were hesitating, and then turned to the left, and suddenly went boldly along the bridge.

"Thunder! he's going to escape us?" called out the two ruffians, who had not lost sight of him.

And they began to run as fast as they could so as to overtake their prey. Cassonade was no longer staggering at all. He turned round as he heard them come up, measured the distance between them at a glance, and saw that he would infallibly be caught and knocked down in the waste ground on the Ile Louviers. Determined to avoid such a fate as that, he at once climbed upon the railing of the bridge, and then leapt into the Seine. He knew very well what he was doing in making this perilous leap. In the first place, he had no choice as to the means of escaping the men pursuing him, and, secondly, he was not afraid of the water.

Chevalier Casse-Cou's squire had not, like his master, been born at a seaport, but he was as good a swimmer as many a sailor, although he had begun life at the Halles, and had seldom been outside Paris. He had served an apprenticeship in the Seine, so to speak, and had engaged in so many "water-parties" with lads of his own age that he knew the river as well as he did the Rue Férou.

From Grenelle to Bercy there was not a current he had not sailed upon, nor an eddy he had not steered clear of. The famous Arche du Diable of the Pont Notre Dame was well known to him, and he could have told how many iron rings there were on the piles, and the quay. The shores of the Ile Saint Louis were especially familiar to him, and he could have navi-

gated everywhere round the island with the ease of a pilot sailing about his native port.

The only serious danger was that of knocking his head against the wooden posts upholding the Pont Rouge. This primitive foot-bridge was built like a stockade protected at its base by buttresses, and there was a danger of being killed by falling among the posts which projected upward on either side. However, although he had plunged very quickly, Cassonade had had time to choose the place where he wished to fall. He, besides, dived according to the principles of the art of swimming, in which he had been proficient from his childhood, and had cleft the water like a frog. His dive made no more noise than the fall of a stone, and as he came down with his body straight, and his arms stretched out, he broke the violence of his fall.

This was good luck, to begin with, but he needed additional good fortune before he would be fully out of danger. Before plunging, he had seen perfectly well that the two rascals who were after him were but fifty paces from the bridge. It was probable that they would come up to see what had become of the fugitive, and Cassonade did not want them to catch sight of him again.

Like the good diver that he was, instead of letting himself rise to the top of the water, he followed the under-current and only came up to take breath at some little distance down the stream, beyond the bridge. One of the posts of the stockade was near by, and he caught hold of it, so as not to be carried further on. He did not wish to follow the water which ran between the two islands, for the ruffians would not have failed to see him, and in that case, the least that could happen would be that they would watch and surprise him as soon as he landed. By good luck the spot where he found himself was well fitted for a hiding-place. The shadow of the bridge extended to some little distance, and as Cassonade's head was all that appeared above the water, it was not visible from the summit.

The squire kept still, and waited to see what would now happen. His position, it must be admitted, was far from pleasant. The water of the Seine is by no means warm in the month of February, and, besides, the violence of the current obliged the swimmer to make great efforts to hold himself up. After several seconds of mingled uncertainty and pain, Cassonade, who had not ceased to look up, again saw his two enemies. They were leaning upon the railing of the bridge, and bending forward in their efforts to spy their victim. After a moment, however, they disappeared, and then they again returned, which showed that they were going from one side of the foot-bridge to the other inspecting the water everywhere. This course proved that he had not yet been seen. "Where are you, comrade? where are you?" called out a voice which Pétronille's husband recognised at once.

It was the leader of the gang who uttered this inviting call; but Cassonade took good care to make no reply. It did not need much cunning to guess that these gentlemen did not take a very tender interest in the sham drunkard who had just escaped them. They hailed him softly, almost as cooks call a pullet when they mean to wring its neck.

"You must answer us, my friend, if you wish us to help you," resumed the voice.

But the squire was not to be entrapped in this way. He kept quiet, and was soon rewarded for his perseverance; for he had the inexpressible satisfaction of hearing the other rascal say in a somewhat louder tone:

"He must have gone to the bottom like a plummet; he won't come up again."

"Let's be off, then," rejoined the leader.

The bridge was not very high, and the wind was on the side where Cassonade found himself, so that he did not lose a word of this significant dialogue.

The two scoundrels almost immediately abandoned their post of observation, and the heels of their boots could be heard ringing out as they went along the bridge. They evidently believed that their man was indeed drowned, and they were going, no doubt, to relieve their assistant, Baluchon, from his useless task, for he was still waiting for them at the corner of the quay.

It was time they did retire, for poor Cassonade would not have been able to hold out a quarter of an hour longer. As soon as he thought himself free from the spies, he let go of the post which his stiffening hands had grasped with difficulty, and began to swim again. He found strength to do this, and, in fact, continued immobility would have been fatal to his life.

The arm of the Seine into which he had plunged was not very wide, and he had leaped almost into the middle of it. A dozen vigorous strokes sufficed to enable him to land. He came on shore upon a gentle slope on one side of the Ile Louviers, almost the only available point, for, on the other side of the river, the Quai d'Anjou presented only high parapets that were almost unapproachable. However, the little island, where there were numerous wood-yards, afforded an easy approach, and a sure asylum.

The great city, which is ever spreading, has now absorbed this strip of land. It is now covered with houses, and blends with the right boundary, for the incessant progress of the city building is like that of the sand-hills on the shores of the ocean. All unbuilt ground is vanishing in the ever-rising tide of construction, so to speak; it is disappearing just as the fishermen's huts constantly vanish under the moving sands from the Atlantic, driven landward by the western winds. However, in 1831, the Ile Louviers was almost as deserted and as woody as the forest of Bondy, the only difference being that in the wood-yards of the island trees assumed the form of planks piled one upon another. Still, there were impenetrable thickets and narrow pathways bordered by high walls. A man might walk between these piles of wood as between piles of bones in the subterranean galleries which extend below Paris, and, indeed, the interminable wood-yards were but forestial catacombs, so to speak.

However, Cassonade had none of these comparisons in his mind; as soon as he came out of the water he shook himself like a dog, and then, as he never lost his head, he put his hand into his pocket, to find out whether his note-case was still safe. The precious 10,000 francs were still in their place, and Cambremer's bank-notes, although very wet, would still satisfy the demands of the detective in the Rue de la Lune.

Reassured as to this point, the squire now began to look about him on all sides to make sure that his tormentors had not followed him. The night was not dark, for the moon was in its first phase. Cassonade could see the whole bank, and even what was transpiring on the Quai d'Anjou and on the bridge. The shore was deserted, and as far as the eye could reach, no human form was visible above the railing of the bridge or the parapet of the quay.

This was the time, or never, to retire; for people who have been in the water do not usually amuse themselves by tarrying upon the shore when once they have safely landed. Morillon's friend certainly did not divert himself for any length of time by contemplating the stars. He was not very well acquainted with the bearings of the island, but remembered that it communicated with the right shore by a narrow pontoon. This he had only to reach to be out of all danger; as for the solitary wood-yards, they did not appear to him to be entirely safe.

He began by wringing the water from his clothes; for he did not wish to look like a Triton when he returned to civilized quarters, and then he left the shore and ventured among the wood-piles. Although there were numerous gaps between them, and paths in every direction, the danger of being lost was not very great, as it was sufficient to bear steadily to the left to find the spot where the island was connected with the mainland. Thus Cassonade found his way by the aid of memory, and took an oblique direction, turning his back to the Pont Rouge. He took care to walk along cautiously, and he often stopped to listen; for he naturally surmised that the wood-yards were guarded, and expected to meet a watchman at every turn.

This prospect was, to a certain extent, encouraging, but it also had its disagreeable side. A watchman would not fail to ask the grocer what he was doing there at so unusual a time of night, and he wished, above all, to avoid explanations. He did not peer round the corner of any pile of wood without looking up and down all the passages. At the third open space he reached, he thought he heard a suspicious sound, and, on listening attentively, he realised that some one was speaking in a low tone near him. There could be no mistake of it, and it was a very disagreeable discovery, for it was impossible for Cassonade to pass on without exposing himself to some disagreeable encounter. Nor was it much easier to retreat, as, at any moment, the unseen persons might emerge from their hiding-place and chase this involuntary night-prowler till they caught him.

In this embarrassing position the ingenious squire thought of a singular device. The pile of wood near which he had stopped formed a kind of stairway, with steps formed by the logs piled up one above the other. So he took off his shoes, so as to make no noise, and climbed as nimbly as a cat to the summit of the pile. Once there, he lay down flat, and stealthily projected his head forward to see the mysterious speakers.

Cassonade's position was a good one for seeing all that was to be seen and hearing all that was to be heard. The platform on which he had stretched himself was almost fifteen feet from the ground, and the speakers were immediately below him. The grocer had no difficulty in making out the appearance and attire of those who were talking together. The shadows cast by the high piles of wood were not dense enough to prevent him from perceiving their broad shoulders, their huge felt hats, which were tipped on one side, and the knotty sticks upon which they were leaning. He had a bird's-eye view of all this, so to speak, and would certainly have found it difficult to see their faces. That did not matter, however, for he could guess who these men were. There were three of them, and it didn't require much cunning to divine that the man who had been sent to watch on the Quai de Béthune had joined his comrades again. The little group was leaning against the pile and talking with a deliberation which showed that they felt quite at their ease. Cassonade held his breath, in order to hear them better, and he did very distinctly hear a conversation which greatly startled him.

"What was the use of sending me to the corner of the Rue Poultier?" said a voice which seemed to belong to Baluchon. "If I had remained with you, I should have caught the man before he reached the bridge."

"Hold your tongue!" replied the leader of the gang, with a shrug of the shoulders; "you have good legs, but we had let him go on at least fifty steps ahead, and you could never have reached him in time to prevent him from ducking down as he did."

"Besides," said the third, "it's all the better as it is, since he's at the bottom of the river."

"Who knows?" replied the sceptical Baluchon.

"Oh! after such a dive and leap as that, and with a current which would sweep a coal-barge along like a feather, there was not much chance for a drunken man."

"And when we called out to him, he would surely have replied if he had been able. A man gets sober all at once when he has his mouth full of Seine water."

"I don't deny that; but never mind, all this isn't clear, and even if the fool is drowned, we are none the less in a bad fix."

"Why?"

"Why, don't you see, the old 'un isn't at all easy to deal with, and when he knows that we've been fooled like a pack of ninnies, he will make us pay dear for it?"

"Dearer than his carriage and horses."

"Oh! if only the coach and horses were lost, he's rich enough to buy them all over again; but the chap that we were to dispatch will talk, and to-morrow all the police will be on the alert."

"And the worst of it all is, that we jabbered away before him in the carriage, and he must know very well who it was who tried to play him this trick?"

"You see what it is not to be able to hold your tongue!" now said the leader of the gang, sententiously.

"All that is Pavard's fault," retorted Baluchon; "if he hadn't been so tight that he could hardly keep up, he would have stayed on his seat, and they couldn't have driven the trap off!"

"Don't say anything against Pavard; he'll arrange everything all right."

"Yes, if he holds on behind, he'll be able to tell us where the trap was taken, and we shall be able to try the dodge again; but, in the meantime, what shall we say to the old 'un?"

"Well, we must go and report ourselves at midnight, and that can't be far off."

"Suppose we don't go at all?"

"That would be a pretty thing! He'd be after us at the meeting to-morrow. No, no, no nonsense!" exclaimed the wise-acre of the council; "we must make off for the Boulevard Bonne Nouvelle, and go like lightning."

Cassonade started, and he noted down this valuable clue in his mind. At the same time, he listened more attentively than ever, for up to this moment the dialogue had not revealed to him anything of any consequence, and he wanted to get hold of some information which would enable him to find the enigmatical personage whom these hired ruffians called "the old 'un."

"Aren't you afraid that he'll be angry?" now asked Baluchon.

"No, I know him ; he makes a great row about things that don't amount to anything, but when there's anything serious, he doesn't lose his time in storming and scolding. I'll tell him the whole thing just as it happened, and I'll wager drinks all round that he'll find a way to settle everything as it should be."

"That's likely enough. He knows what he's about, and can do whatever he chooses. If it hadn't been for him, we should all have been caught when the excisemen came to the house near the Barrière d'Enfer."

This last remark was a revelation to the attentive squire. His instinct had guided him well, in leading him to listen to the dark sayings of the scoundrels whom he had encountered at the "*Lapin qui Saute*," for he suddenly detected a clue between this strange adventure and the affair of the vault. He had not yet guessed, however, that the intended victim of "the old 'un's" revenge was none other than his dear master, and that, in saving an unknown man, he had really rescued Francis Cambremer from death. Still, he was beginning to have a clear perception of how matters stood, and did not delay changing his previous plans. The ruffians to whom he was listening had just made up their minds to go and find their chieftain, whom, so Cassonade suspected, was named Biroulas. This was a fine opportunity, perhaps the only one, for discovering the lair of the mysterious enemy of the dwellers in the Rue Férou, and the intrepid ex-grocer made up his mind not to miss it.

He forgot that he was alone, chilled through, and unarmed, having, moreover, to deal with three vigorous men, capable of any crime. Just before, he had merely thought of escaping their pursuit and getting under shelter as soon as possible. Now, however, he was resolved to dog their footsteps, even to the abode of their abominable master. Instead of being tracked by the rascals, Cassonade was about to track them.

The plan was bold and noble, but not easily executed, it must be admitted. So as not to lose the track, it was necessary to follow the three scoundrels closely, and if they turned round before the journey ceased to be dangerous, Cassonade would find himself at their mercy.

Would they cross the Ile Louviers in its entire length, or return by the Pont Rouge? This last hypothesis seemed the most probable, for they could scarcely care to find themselves face to face with any of the men who had charge of the wood-yards, and indeed Cassonade did not clearly realise what they had come to this spot for. However, this stood revealed by what followed.

"As you're in such a hurry to report," said Baluchon, "you needn't have brought us here to fritter away our time."

"I wanted to see whether our guzzler would come up on the water again; and, as he couldn't land anywhere but on the island, I wanted to wait awhile for him. Before we go off, we'll glance about a little on the shore and among the wood-piles, and if we don't see anything, we will get off."

While the leader was giving the final instructions to his assistants, the grocer drew quietly back. Near the spot where he had lain down, a very high pile of wood rose up above the level of the platform, which he had chosen as a post of observation. It consisted of logs which the workmen had merely left there temporarily, having, no doubt, begun to demolish the pile that day; and this column, which was not very solid at its base, was just above the spot where the council was being held.

Cassonade rose with great care, and intended to lean against this shaky pile and wait until the ruffians had gone off. He meant to let them get some-

what ahead before coming down the steps, at the foot of which he had left his shoes. However, just as he was about to take up his position, his foot slipped on a large log. The poor squire tripped, extended his arms to regain his equilibrium, and at last came against the pile, which toppled over with a tremendous noise. Cassonade, suddenly deprived of his support, fell with the logs, and at once lost consciousness.

The time which elapsed between his fall and the moment when he recovered his senses was not of very long duration; but his revival was anything but pleasant. Pétronille's unfortunate husband was lying on his back in the midst of a confused heap of wood, and his bruised limbs were benumbed.

Fortunately his mind was clear, and his first thought was of the enemies who had been watching him. The unlucky accident which he had met with placed him in their power, and he waited, expecting to feel their hands upon him; for it had not occurred to him that they also would suffer by the fall of the pile of wood. However, no one stirred, and certain sounds like a death-rattle caught Cassonade's ear. He then made an effort, and succeeded in getting into a kneeling posture, whereupon he thought that he saw a body half hidden under the fallen pile and began to think that Biroulas's hirelings might have had an unpleasant time of it as well as himself.

This was the moment for rising up and slipping off; but the grocer was naturally compassionate, and he began by trying to lift the logs which were crushing the man who lay beside him. However he was interrupted in the performance of this charitable act by the arrival of five or six men, who seized him by the collar and made him stand up, with a violence which augured nothing very pleasant.

"Aha! you robber! you good-for-nothing thief! we've got you at last, and you won't steal our wood any more!"

These abusive words so overwhelmed the unfortunate squire, that he could not find a word to say in self-defence. He was only able to understand that he had fallen into the hands of some fellows who had been watching over the wood-piles, and that they took him for a thief.

"Look! there's another chap under the logs," said one of the party; whereupon the others replied, all at once: "So much the better; that's one the less."

"Well, take this chap, and be off with him to the police-station!" resumed the individual who had been the first to speak.

II.

WHICH RELATES HOW MORILLON'S JOURNEY ENDED.

WHILE Cassonade was struggling against all these terrible mishaps, his friend Morillon made a deal of headway. After accomplishing the bold stroke to which he owed the capture of the coach, the adroit cab-driver drove like lightning to the Quai de Béthune.

The furious outcry of the gang reached his ears, but he went on without caring what happened behind him. In this he was wrong, for two reasons: in the first place, he had left his friend in a terrible predicament, and, besides, without being aware of it, he was taking away with him a very troublesome witness likely to report his future movements.

To do him justice, before he had arrived at the Pont de la Tournelle he began to feel anxious about Cassonade. The plan of the carrying off had been formed and executed so rapidly, that Morillon had not had time to reflect as to its results. But, as he drove along the quay, he began to think of the worthy fellow whom he had thus deserted, and he was about to stop his horses to return to the poor grocer.

An incident which occurred at the corner of the Rue Poultier made him change his mind. A man who emerged from this street at the very moment when the carriage passed, attempted to run after it, and this reminded the driver that the individual most in danger in this affair was himself. Indeed, Cassonade had many chances of getting out of the difficulty by continuing to feign drunkenness, whereas Morillon, if he allowed himself to be caught, was sure of having the whole pack at his heels.

He therefore drove on, urging his horses to the top of their speed, so as to get out of reach, but intending to return to help his friend as soon as some respectable pedestrians appeared, and he could confide the vehicle to them. As for the scamp who was hanging on to the carriage, Morillon did not know that he was there; still, as a precaution, he rose up in his seat and dealt out several lashes with his whip. Unfortunately, the rascal was too well hidden under the coach-springs to be seen, and if the lash of vengeance reached him, he succeeded in bearing the pain without giving any sign calculated to reveal his presence.

The bridge was crossed at a full gallop, but when once they reached the left shore, Morillon, like a prudent driver, drew in his reins. The neighbourhood which he had now reached was not much more lively than that of the Ile Saint Louis. All the shops had long since been closed; there were but few lighted windows, and, besides, it was not by knocking at any of the doors that he could procure assistance.

He therefore continued to drive on very fast, following the course of the Seine; and near the entrance of the Rue de la Huchette, he, for the first time, saw a group of men, who appeared to be belated. He was about to stop to tell them his story, when he saw that they were all of them most unmistakably intoxicated, and that they were going home, singing as loud as they could bawl, and knocking against the walls as they went. They would be but a poor help, supposing even that they could understand what the matter was. Morillon thereupon made up his mind to proceed, and whipped up his horses again, so as to reach the Quai Saint Michel, where he hoped to find something better in the way of assistance.

Paris, in 1831, was very unlike Paris as it is now, and in this neighbourhood, where now-a-days there is such incessant bustle, so to speak, only a few passers-by were then to be met. It was not till he turned into the Rue Saint Jacques that the owner of the yellow cabriolet saw some students and their sweethearts going towards the heights of the Quartier Latin. On the spot where the Tribunal de Commerce now stands, there was then a ball-room called the "Prado," where the gay dancers of the Grande Chaumière were wont to come. Everybody was now leaving this establishment, where balls of the gayest description were given, and no one appeared likely to take any interest in serious matters.

Besides, Morillon was beginning to think that, since he had been driving on, Cassonade must by some means or other have got out of the false position in which he had left him. Either the scamps had left him to himself, or, even if they had molested him, they had certainly not waited at the corner of the Pont Rouge to be arrested. A return was, therefore,

useless at that moment, and it would be better to drive the coach and its load straight on to the Rue de Vaugirard.

The poor fellow in the vehicle must be ill at ease, and Morillon was anxious to help him to get out of his plight. He might, it is true, have shortened his sufferings by stopping at the station-house at the corner of the Rue de la Harpe, and placing the unfortunate man in the hands of the police. But Morillon, like all of his calling, had a secret dislike of the authorities who never spared drivers when they infringed the rules, and ever since his adventure at the Barrière d'Enfer, he had averted his head at the mere sight of a station-house.

His own home, besides, was not very far off, and he made up his mind to return to it at once by the shortest road possible. He went past the group of riotous students without calling out to them, but not without the noisy troop giving vent to a variety of cries. Being used to the ways of the neighbourhood, he took little notice of this, and did not obey the injunction to "lash out behind" given him in every imaginable tone, for he considered all this to be a joke.

This trifling incident was the last that disturbed his trip. In less than a quarter of an hour's time, the swift horses had stopped in front of Morillon's abode in the Rue de Vaugirard. The vehicle had scarcely drawn up when the door was set ajar, and Jacqueline appeared. The housewife had a candle in her hand, and seemed to be somewhat out of temper. "Here you are at last!" said she, in a tone of vexation; "what is the meaning of your coming home at such a time as this? Where have you come from? And where did you pick up that carriage and those horses?"

This deluge of questions would probably have gone on for ever, if Jacqueline's attention had not been drawn to a man who suddenly alighted on the pavement and began to run towards the Luxembourg as fast as his legs could carry him.

The good woman uttered a cry of terror, and almost let her candle fall. As for her husband, who had risen up on the box just as the spy fled, he uttered a frightful oath, and hastily alighted to run after the ruffian who had had the impudence to ride behind the vehicle. However, he was no sooner on the ground than he saw that it would be impossible for him to catch the fugitive.

"I ought to have known it," he growled, "and that will teach me to listen another time to what people call out to me."

"In Heaven's name, what is the matter with you, my man?" asked Jacqueline; "as sure as I came from Picardy, any one would think that you were cracked."

"That's not the question, wife," replied Morillon, mysteriously. "that scamp has escaped; well, let him go and get hanged somewhere else! But now you must help me to take out the man who is inside the carriage."

"Is there any Christian creature in it, then?" demanded Jacqueline, with a frightened look.

"Yes, there is, and it will be a good thing if he is still alive."

"Oh! good heavens, Pierre! I hope to goodness that you've not been doing anything that you oughtn't to do."

"Don't talk so much; but just help me," said Morillon, sharply, as he opened the door of the vehicle. However, Jacqueline seemed to be petrified, and did not stir. Her husband lost patience, and peeping into the vehicle he caught a glimpse of a man upon the cushions. He did not

amuse himself by calling out to this person to rouse him from the sleep in which he seemed to lie, but seized him by the middle of the body, raised him up, not without some trouble, and finally stood him upon his feet on the sidewalk, sustaining him to prevent him from falling.

"Merciful Heaven!" he exclaimed, with horror; "they've tied him—and gagged him—no wonder that he doesn't stir. Come, hold the candle, so that I can see this chap's 'phiz.'"

The housewife at last made up her mind to approach, but her hand trembled so visibly, that Morillon snatched the light from her so as to be able to look at the stranger's face. Scarcely had he done so, than with a cry of surprise, he exclaimed: "It is he! but no; it is impossible!—yes, it is—it's he!"

Jacqueline, who had at first almost fallen to the ground, now put an end to Pierre's uncertainty, by crying out: "Why, it's the gentleman whom I rescued from the cellar!" and, then, clasping her hands, she added, "the gentleman whom your friend Courapié knows!"

"Monsieur Cambremer, the chevalier!" repeated Morillon, who could not believe his own eyes. However, quickly taking from his pocket a knife, such as drivers always carry, he soon cut the cords that bound the prisoner's arms, and removed the gag from his mouth. Francis Cambremer looked at his rescuer with a wild expression and uttered a few hoarse sounds without being able to speak a word distinctly. He attempted to walk as soon as Morillon had cut the cords that had bound his limbs, but he staggered like a drunken man; and if the able-bodied Jacqueline had not supported him, he would have fallen heavily to the ground.

"Wife," said the driver, hurriedly, "go ahead! I will take him to my own bed."

The housewife obeyed, and lighted the way for her husband, who had passed his arm about Cambremer's waist and had helped him as well as he could into the house. Chevalier Casse-Cou, half-pushed, half-lifted, gradually began to move his feet, and finally succeeded in reaching the sitting-room of the worthy couple, where he was placed in a chair—the same upon which he had sat when he had been rescued from the vault.

It seemed as though all his adventures were destined to bring him to the modest home in the Rue de Vaugirard, and as if Morillon was destined to take part in them. However, at that moment, Cambremer's head was not in a state to reason as to this; for it seemed as though his mind had left him. He stammered incoherently, and began words which he did not finish. The name of Paul Vernier returned to his lips unceasingly.

Morillon looked at him with feelings of deep pity, and he would have given the yellow cabriolet and La Grise into the bargain to help the man whom he respected more than any one else in the world. However, he had left the vehicle, captured from the enemy, in the street, and it was important, above all things, to secure this booty which might help one to find the ruffians again. So he left the injured man with Jacqueline for an instant, and then went out to unharness the horses and place them and the carriage under shelter.

But when he reached the door, he saw with astonishment that the horses had turned round, although there was no one on the coach-box. While he was wondering as to the cause of this change of front, a whistle was heard in the street, and at this sound, which was, doubtless, a signal familiar to them, the two horses set off at a brisk trot.

III.

IN WHICH WE FIND OURSELVES IN THE RUE FÉROU ONCE MORE.

THERE are quiet intervals in the most romantic lives, just as on the stormiest seas the waves are sometimes still. On the morrow of the day upon which so many strange incidents had occurred, the inhabitants of the house in the Rue Férou were gathered about the fire in the chevalier's sitting room, like boats driven into port by adverse winds.

The chevalier had received the care required by his condition at Morillon's house, and as soon as he felt sufficiently revived, and was in possession of his intellectual faculties once more, he had set out for his own lodgings, where, since the morning, he had been expected with feverish impatience. It would be idle to attempt to describe the delight of Madame Mongis and Martha on seeing him again. Since Paul Vernier's departure—when the young fellow was sent by them to look for the chevalier—the poor women had passed through all the anguish of disappointed expectation. Twenty times, at least, had the young girl gone to the windows which looked out upon the street to ascertain if any vehicle approached.

The widow, who had more self-command, contented herself with glancing from time to time at the clock, and she tried to calm Martha's anxiety by assigning various reasons for the delay. Even poor little Baïa expressed her anxiety for her good friend in her own way. She left her playthings from time to time to throw her arms around Madame Monzi's neck and weep, and this child-like grief was not calculated to encourage her protectresses. However, when Morillon gave the bell a strong pull, which startled the ladies from their mournful torpor, there was great delight in the rooms on the second floor.

The worthy driver had come up to tell them of the miracle to which Francis Cambremer owed his rescue, and to inform the widow and her daughter that the hero of so many adventures was waiting in his rooms to see them. Poor Casse-Cou was so broken down by pain and excitement that he scarcely had strength enough to go up the first flight of stairs, and Morillon had been obliged to undress him and put him to bed like a child.

It was in bed that he received the devoted friends whose lives were now so bound up with his own, and that he kissed his beloved Baïa. He replied to all the questions of Madame Mongis by begging her to wait till the next day for explanations; however, he asked with strange persistence that Paul Vernier might be sent for. No one dared thwart the wishes of a man who had gone through such terrible suffering, and the visitors retired on tiptoe to allow the chevalier to enjoy the rest he so much needed.

Morillon had beforehand said everything he could to reassure them as to the condition of the prisoner so fortunately rescued. Cambremer's robust frame had not suffered so much as might be surmised from the cruelty to which he had been subjected—cruelty such as would have killed many a man; and, except that he still felt a sensation of suffocation from the long-continued wearing of a gag, he had no serious symptoms. However, fatigue had made him very sleepy, and forced him to defer the considera-

tion of serious matters till a long night's rest restored his full clearness of perception.

Madame Mongis, in unwillingly making up her mind to leave him to repose, decided not to forget the desire he had so strongly expressed. He had so earnestly insisted upon seeing Paul that, in spite of the lateness of the hour, and also of her own fears with regard to the young man, she immediately sent a messenger to him. The confidential mission naturally devolved on Morillon, and the unwearied cab-driver set out for the Porte Saint Denis without asking for any further explanation.

He had some difficulty in finding the house where M. Vernier lived, for Madame Mongis did not know the exact number; but he succeeded in discovering it at last, and, going upstairs, he knocked at the door of the little room where M. Bousenna's clerk was at that moment struggling against temptation.

Paul's surprise was great, indeed, when he beheld the worthy man who had taken him to the *Barrière d'Enfer*, for he expected another and quite a different visit, and in his agitation he thrust the scarcely finished acknowledgment for the four thousand francs into his pocket. However, the information brought him by Morillon was of so serious a nature that it made him forget his own emotions of the night. Without thinking any further of the terrible consequences of his fault, Paul Vernier followed his conductor with an eagerness due to his friendship for Chevalier Casse-Cou.

During the time which was spent in going from the boulevard to the Rue Férou, he had time to inquire into the details of the perilous adventures of his protector, and when he arrived at the house where Madame Mongis resided she had nothing to tell him that he did not know already. Her welcome was less cold than he had feared it would be, and, although Martha was not present at the interview, her lover congratulated himself upon having gained the right, through all that had recently occurred, of returning to the house again.

It is needless to say that Cassonade had not yet come back; and in his absence Paul found that he could make himself useful by watching over Cambremer as he slept. The widow took her place in the sitting-room, not without urging the young fellow to attend to the chevalier's wants, and the latter reposed in the adjoining room as quietly as might be.

Paul had no difficulty in watching, for he was too much agitated to feel any desire for sleep. Remorse, which for a moment had remained in abeyance, was now gnawing at his heart; he felt that the time was coming when he must confess that he had done a shameful act, and that he must do so before those whom he loved and respected most of all human beings, excepting his own mother.

More than once during this grim watching, which seemed so long, he wished to rise up and fly. But an indefinable sentiment, the vague hope which never leaves either the guilty or the unfortunate, kept him on the chair where he awaited the dawn of day. He could not help remembering that in these very rooms he had once wanted to kill himself, and that the generous intervention of the chevalier had alone saved him from suicide. He thought of falling once again at the feet of his providential friend and telling him all; but then he reflected that Cambremer would undoubtedly be more severe with an incorrigible gambler than with a youth led into a first fault.

Night passed by in alternate hope and discouragement, and when Casse-

Cou awoke in the morning, Paul Vernier had not yet formed any resolution. The first few moments were spent by both protector and protected in exchanging friendly words. Francis looked upon himself almost as a father to the young fellow whom he had saved, and Paul felt a truly filial love for the chevalier. However, after this very natural exchange of affectionate expressions, they soon began to talk of the serious difficulties of the situation.

Cambremer, whom seven hours' sleep had fully restored to clearness of mind and strength, began by telling his young friend about all that had happened to him on the night before. The narrative was short and precise, quite free from useless words.

Paul realised that Chevalier Casse-Cou only spoke of the dangers which he had gone through as a preface to laying a new plan of action before him, and he felt humiliated in presence of so much modest courage. Cambremer, on the other hand, did not question the young fellow as to the use which he had made of his time. Indeed, he did not know that it had been spent elsewhere than in M. Bousenna's office.

This was a misfortune, for, perhaps, if his friend had opened the way, the young man might have confided everything to him. The horrible treachery of M. de Taulade was so evident that it would suffice to relate all about the dinner and the game to explain in a great measure his weakness. However, the victim of M. de Taulade's machinations lacked the courage to anticipate questions which the chevalier did not think of asking. Being asked nothing, he told nothing.

Cambremer, after finishing his narrative, begged Paul to light the fire in the sitting-room while he got up, and then to go in search of Madame Mongis. "My dear boy," he added, pressing his hand, "we must have a serious talk, and that is why I sent for you last night. I have not told you all as yet, but I will not conceal from you that I shall now need you all the time."

Paul stammered out something about his employer and the requirements of the banking-house, but the chevalier interrupted him by exclaiming, in a voice which trembled with excitement: "We will talk about that man presently."

M. Bousenna's secretary was not accustomed to hear his protector speak so lightly of duty, and felt surprised at being advised to let the time for repairing to his desk pass by. However, he did not venture to make any objections, but went upstairs to Madame Mongis's rooms to ask her to come down and see the chevalier.

The widow had long been up and received Paul in her dining-room. The early breakfast had evidently been disturbed by his ring at her bell, and the lover looked sadly at the seat which Martha had just left, no doubt at her mother's request. It was clear to him that he was looked upon with mistrust, and that it would be difficult to regain favour. However, he thought that he caught sight of Martha peering into the room from behind the door of the parlour, and he mustered up a little courage. If the young girl thus endeavoured to try to catch a stealthy glimpse of him, it must be that she was not offended. Madame Mongis, however, begged Paul to tell Cambremer that she would come in an instant, and she gave him to understand by her reserved manner that she did not wish to prolong the interview.

Half an hour later, the council had met. Cambremer was seated on one side of the fireplace; Martha's mother faced him, and Paul Vernier was placed between them.

The conversation began by some anxious questions as to the brave chevalier's condition, but he proved to be hardier and stronger than ever, in spite of so many trials. He now wished to speak of more serious matters. "Do you know the name of the rascal who wanted to get me murdered by the ruffians in his employ?" he asked, without further preamble.

"Isn't it Biroulas?" asked Madame Mongis, in surprise.

"Maybe it is, but it is Bousenna, also."

"Bousenna! why, that is the name of the banker by whom Monsieur Vernier is employed."

"My employer!" exclaimed Paul, amazed by this startling revelation.

"It is true," said Cambremer, quietly.

"What leads you to believe so?"

"I will tell you."

Martha's mother stared at the chevalier and wondered whether his mind was not wandering. As for Paul he had not expected such intelligence as this, but it coincided with certain vague suspicions which he himself had sometimes had, and he listened attentively.

"If I had a shadow of doubt," resumed the chevalier, "I would not tire you with my conjectures at a moment when we must come to a decision as to what course to pursue, and when every hour is fraught with danger and may cost us our lives. However, since yesterday I have had time to reflect and now I no longer believe, but feel sure."

"Good heavens! whom can we trust?" said Madame Mongis, in a low tone.

"Not that scoundrel assuredly," replied Cambremer, with a mournful smile; "and I congratulate you on not having confided any money to him, as I have done."

"But I sent four thousand francs to him yesterday!" exclaimed the poor widow.

"How was that?" asked the chevalier, in great surprise.

"Yes, I sent the money through Monsieur Vernier, who undertook to pay it in for me. I wanted to bank it before going away."

"Did you attend to it, Paul?" asked the chevalier.

Five seconds or so elapsed between this question, and the reply given by the unhappy youth; if, during that short interval, his agitation had paralyzed his tongue forever, the events which followed would have proved very different. A very faintly articulated assent was his only reply. Why did he utter it? Why did not the remembrance of his mother arrest the fatal word upon his lips? What madness urged him thus to sign a compact with dishonour? He never knew why he did so, for there are moments in life when words come in advance of thought, and his will had nothing to do with the unconscious affirmation.

"Dear me!" sighed Cambremer, "it is fated that this monster shall injure all whom I love. However, Paul could not guess that a man who had formerly been connected with his father was at the head of a gang of ruffians."

"I cannot believe that this is really true!" murmured Madame Mongis.

"The loss of money can always be repaired," rejoined the chevalier, "and would to Heaven that we had nothing else to fear! However, I hope that it will soon be out of Monsieur Bousenna's power to injure us."

"Then it was this man who tried to kill our poor Baïa, after killing her mother?" said the widow, joining her hands. "It is he who yesterday tried—"

"To have me thrown into the Seine," rejoined Cambremer; "and Heaven forbid that he has succeeded in killing poor Cassonade in addition to all his other crimes."

"Ah! that would be too great a misfortune, and I cannot believe in it."

"I shall know what to believe before the day is over; but before I explain to you what I intend to do, I must tell you how I became certain that Biroulas was this very banker."

Paul Vernier was greatly excited, and while his protector was talking it seemed to him as though he were in a dream.

"You remember," continued Cambremer, "all that I told you yesterday, when that good fellow Morillon brought me home?"

Paul and Madame Mongis both gave a nod of assent.

"However, certain details may have escaped your mind, and there are others which I did not have time to acquaint you with. For instance, I did not tell you that the rascals who gagged me talked about their leader among themselves while we were in the carriage. They called him 'the old un,' and 'the old man,' and did not hesitate to do so before me; for they were about to kill me, and it seemed as if they had nothing to fear from me. The 'old one' was very rich, they said; the 'old man' could do anything that he undertook to do, and he owned the carriage and horses which were taking us along. Now, all this suggested Monsieur Bousenna, the rich banker."

Madame Mongis listened attentively, but did not appear to be altogether convinced.

"Wait; this is not all," said the chevalier. "Before I was gagged, and while I could still speak, I expressed my suspicions as to this banker, who had begun by pretending not to recognise me, and had then followed me everywhere about during my second visit to the lodgings in the Rue Sainte Barbe. The scoundrels, however, merely laughed at what I said at the moment while I spoke, but afterwards, when they thought that I was powerless, the leader literally said this: 'I shouldn't have been sorry to hear him talk on, so as to find out exactly what he knows about the old man.' Now, of whom could he be speaking, unless it were of Monsieur Bousenna, whom I had just been accusing in his presence?"

"True," replied Madame Mongis.

"Well, I have other proofs besides. When the spurious detective interfered in the courtyard of the house on the Boulevard Bonne Nouvelle, it was he who mentioned Monsieur Bousenna to the policemen; it was he who recommended him to the commissary, declaring him to be a highly respectable resident in the neighbourhood. So they knew each other, didn't they?"

"At all events, the false detective knew who the banker was."

"They knew each other, I tell you; for I remember that they exchanged signs more than once, and if I had not been blinded by anger, I should have detected them in the very act of plotting together under the commissary's eyes."

"But the commissary didn't notice anything of all this, did he?"

"Oh! they tricked him as well as they tricked me, and when I remind him of certain circumstances connected with the affair he will no longer entertain any doubt about the connivance of the banker and the old hag who keeps the wretched lodging-house where Baïa and her mother were taken on their arrival in Paris."

"Yes, Baïa recognised the house, and she is too intelligent to have made a mistake," said Madame Mongis.

"Well, do you now understand," exclaimed Cambremer, "why her mother's murderer chose that den? Isn't it evident that the female monster who keeps this place was placed there by this Monsieur Bousenna to whom she appealed to prove her respectability? Oh! that man is a very clever scoundrel, and our spy in the Rue de la Lune told no more than the truth when he said that this man Biroulas transformed himself as he pleased."

"But come, sir," said Paul Vernier, timidly, "doesn't it appear to you difficult for Monsieur Bousenna to play so many parts when he never leaves his office?"

"He may simply be affiliated with the gang," said Madame Mongis.

"I thought so at first, but now I am sure that the man who was in the box at the Odéon—Biroulas, if you choose to call him so—is none other than Bousenna, in fact I recognised him."

"What! has he the same face?" asked Paul, who had not seen the murderer.

"Oh! he had removed the false beard which he wore on the night of the crime, but he could not change his eyes or his teeth. Why it was that the characteristic features of his sinister countenance did not strike me on the day when I saw him for the second time—it was with you, my dear Paul—I cannot tell; but what I do know now is, that if I saw him, even disguised as a priest or a soldier, I should at once exclaim: 'It is he!'"

Madame Mongis was beginning to yield to evidence, and Paul, who had private reasons for distrusting his employer, no longer doubted the truth of the chevalier's statements.

"As for the rest," resumed Cambremer, "my plans are all made, and the step which you took yesterday may be useful to me. Will you give me the receipt for the sum which you paid in?" he added, addressing Madame Mongis.

"Monsieur Paul has not yet given it to me," said Martha's mother, quietly.

If the Chevalier Casse-Cou had not been entirely absorbed in his plans for vengeance, he would have remarked the frightful paleness that suddenly spread over the features of his favourite. The words which Madame Mongis had just spoken had gone straight to the heart of her daughter's lover. He was tempted to confess what he had done, but he had taken the first step, and the fatal "Yes" which he had uttered, forced him to continue practising the same deception.

"Be kind enough to give me the receipt, my dear fellow," Cambremer now said to him; "I wish to see it for reasons which you will presently understand."

Paul might have replied that he had left it at home, but he saw Madame Mongis look at him, and thought that he had read suspicion in her eyes. At the same moment his evil genius whispered to him that his employer was about to be arrested, and could not denounce the forgery, even admitting that the signature were ever shown to him.

"It must be in the pocket of my overcoat, and I will go and get it," he said, rising abruptly to go into the ante-room.

He had seen pen and ink there, and could at once sign the forged acknowledgment which he had already nearly completed when Morillon had come to fetch him on the night before.

"Before I make my report to the police," said Cambremer, when he again found himself alone with Madame Mongis, "I wish to find myself face to face with this man once more, and the money which you have deposited in his bank will serve me as an excuse for going there."

"Then you are not afraid that—"

"I am not afraid of anything, for I shall see him at his office in broad daylight, and in an hour's time after our interview he will be arrested. I am anxious to end the matter, for I have not told you all as yet."

"What other crime can this fiend have committed?"

"Why, he has been trying to ruin Paul. Why does he hate him also, as well as us? I cannot say; but for six months past he has been combining every plot imaginable to bring the poor boy to ruin, and I suspect that he wishes to satisfy some feeling of personal revenge. He was formerly acquainted with Paul's father, and there is a mystery in the past which I have not yet been able to find out."

"Good heavens! let us hope that he won't play some other fiendish trick. I am afraid that—"

Madame Mongis was at this moment interrupted by the return of Paul Vernier. "Here is the acknowledgment, sir," said he, holding out a paper. His voice trembled as well as his hand, but Cambremer did not notice this; for, after an indifferent glance at the signature, he laid the receipt upon the mantel-piece. "My dear Paul," said he, gently, "I hope that you have confidence in me?"

"Oh! can you doubt it, sir?" stammered the young man.

"No; and the proof that I don't is, that I am going to ask you to do a thing which may perhaps annoy you."

"What is it, sir?"

"I must beg of you to remain here until we are rid of this scoundrel. He must not see you again."

Paul took good care not to refuse a request which for so many reasons agreed with his own wishes, but he had no time to reply. The door of the room was slowly opened, and a man, who was far from being expected, entered. The individual who now appeared—like the statue of the Commander in the opera of "Don Giovanni"—was indeed none other than M. Bousenna.

It was Martha who had admitted the banker. She followed behind him, and at the moment when he entered she timidly announced him.

"Sir," said she, addressing Cambremer, "here is a gentleman who is asking for Monsieur Paul Vernier, and who thought that he would find him in your part of the house."

The banker had, in fact, rung at the bell on Madame Mongis's floor, and the young girl had been almost terrified on seeing his stern face at the door.

She had never seen him previously, but had guessed how he looked. Paul had spoken more than once of the man by whom he was employed for the time being; he had described his disagreeable countenance and imitated the surly tone of his voice. Martha had, indeed, been tempted to shut the door in the face of the unpleasant visitor, but she had hesitated to do so, remembering that he had some control over the destiny of her lover, and so she decided to ask him to repair with her to the first-floor rooms.

The door of Chevalier Casse-Cou's apartments was ajar, and she had merely to push it open more widely to usher M. Bousenna into the private room where the friends were at that moment taking counsel together. For more than one reason the young girl did not wish to be present at the

scene which she foresaw. It would be disagreeable to her to hear Paul's employer find fault with him, and scarcely had she stammered out the words of introduction ere she discreetly withdrew. The banker thus remained standing alone before three persons upon whom his coming produced an immense effect.

Madame Mongis had turned pale, Paul was as red as a cherry, and Cambremer had risen up as quickly as though he had had a spring inside him. The strangest part about the picture thus presented was that M. Bousenna himself seemed to feel a part of the impression which he had produced. In spite of his habitually imperturbable calmness and, indeed, icy coldness, the financier of the Boulevard Bonne Nouvelle suffered some marks of astonishment, if not of fright, to appear. His black eyes flashed at the sight of Chevalier Casse-Cou, and a cloud passed over his harsh, though regular, features. However, this was but a passing emotion, and he soon regained the stiffness of manner and bearing that was usual with him.

They all looked at each other for a few seconds, like troops on the battlefield, before opening fire. Cambremer, impetuous as usual, was the first to make the attack. "This is too much audacity," said he, going towards the unexpected visitor; "how dare you come here?"

"Indeed, sir," said the banker, drily, "I have no business with you. I have merely come to find one of my clerks who has failed to come to the bank this morning; and I see that I was not mistaken in the belief that I should find him here."

"These rooms are mine," exclaimed the chevalier, whose anger led him further than he intended; "and I can turn you out of them at once, if I choose."

"You will not be at that trouble," replied M. Bousenna, more and more stiffly; "let Monsieur Vernier go with me, and I will retire."

"What have you to say to him, let me ask?"

"That is my business."

"Excuse me, it is so much my business that you shall not stir until you answer me!" said Cambremer, placing himself in front of the door so as to prevent the banker from leaving the room.

"We must come to some understanding," said the latter, with a forced smile; "just now you wished to turn me out (which, let me remark, is an affront for which I shall call you to account at a later day), whereas now you seem disposed to detain me forcibly."

"You scoundrel!" exclaimed Chevalier Casse-Cou, in exasperation; "it isn't I who mean to detain you forcibly, but the law, which will call you to account for your crimes!"

M. Bousenna shrugged his shoulders, and maintained a most disdainful silence. Madame Mongis looked on with very natural alarm, but the coolness preserved by the banker was beginning to make some impression upon her, and she began to wonder whether Cambremer's accusations had any serious foundation. She had absolute confidence in her dear neighbour's good faith and generosity, but she somewhat feared that the excitement in which he had been living for some time past had, in this instance, misled him.

As for Paul Vernier, the arrival of his employer had completely upset him. He did not doubt but what his protector was right in believing the banker to be a thorough scoundrel, and would willingly have added his own proofs of this to those possessed by the chevalier; but the feeling of his own shame overwhelmed him, and kept him silent. The receipt which

bore M. Bousenna's forged signature, the terrible receipt, was lying there upon the mantel-piece. He had a wild desire to seize it and throw it into the fire ; but then he remembered that Madame Mongis was present, and he withdrew from the fire-side so as to fly away from temptation. But the fascinating paper attracted him in spite of himself, and he gradually drew nearer and nearer again to this mute testimony of his crime. Fortunately for him, the parties interested were thinking of something else than of watching his movements, and his anxiety was not remarked.

"Well, sir," finally said the banker, "you use words too insulting for me to reply in the same manner. I might have expected this extravagant language, however, by the way in which you talked yesterday, when I was fortunate enough to render you some service ; but if you'll say what it is that you have against me—"

"What !" interrupted Cambremer, more and more furiously. "Ah ! I will tell you what you want to know—Yes ! since you venture to recall what you did yesterday, I will tell you what your hirelings did."

"My hirelings !" repeated the banker, with a look of perfect innocence.

"Your accomplices, whom you disguised as detectives, and who attempted to kill me."

"His madness is returning," said M. Bousenna, in a low tone, but taking care to let himself be overheard by Madame Mongis.

"You did not expect to see me again, did you ?" exclaimed the chevalier, whose rage made him lose the thread of his discourse.

"Why not, sir ?" asked the banker, without seeming to be at all disturbed. "It is true that I did not come here to see *you* ; but I was not at all surprised when I found you here."

"You lie ! and I know what brought you ; you thought that I was dead, and you wished to see for yourself the present abode of the poor child whose mother you killed ; you would have returned here to-night with false keys, and you would have broken in, like the thief that you are—"

"Madame," said M. Bousenna, turning to the widow, "I have not the honour of knowing you, but I trust that you will interfere to put an end to this scene that has lasted only too long."

Madame Mongis could not well remain indifferent to this appeal, and, laying her hand on Cambremer's arm, she looked at him with a supplicating air. The chevalier was so struck by the expression of her face that he endeavoured to calm himself. Violence was not the right method to employ if he wished to obtain his object, for his enemy had not yet asked for quarter, and the calmness with which he bore all the accusations heaped upon him was alarming.

"I have nothing more to do here, if Monsieur Vernier refuses to go with me," quietly resumed M. Bousenna ; "but I must remark that I cannot keep a clerk who passes his time away from my office. I shall write to Saint Omer to-night to inform Madame Vernier of her son's conduct."

"And I," replied Cambremer, who had also grown somewhat calmer, "will write to tell her into what hands her son has fallen."

Madame Mongis was absolutely certain that her friend was in the wrong in thus disposing of the young man's future. However, she thought it her duty to interfere. "Sir," said she to the banker, "I don't know what fault you can find with Monsieur Vernier, but if it be that he was absent yesterday, I assure you that it was for a very natural reason. I requested him to call at my house to receive some money which I wished

to place in your hands, and which he took charge of ; and this morning he only returned here to bring me your receipt."

The excellent widow, in giving this explanation of Paul's absence, thought that she was arranging matters in a way that would prove satisfactory to all parties concerned. "Have you this receipt, madame?" at once asked M. Bousenna, whose eyes sparkled.

"Here it is!" said Martha's mother, holding out the fatal paper.

Paul raised his hand to his breast, as though a bullet had struck him, and let himself fall into a chair. The banker had seized hold of the receipt with an eagerness which sufficed to enlighten Madame Mongis as to the extent of her imprudence. He examined it attentively for an instant, folded it carefully, and put it into his pocket. Cambremer looked on without understanding the meaning of this action.

"I thought so," said M. Bousenna, in an ironical tone.

"What do you mean?" stammered Madame Mongis, trembling in every limb.

"What I mean is very clear ; this receipt is a forgery !"

"You are lying again!" shouted the chevalier.

"Your insults do not affect me," replied the banker, drily ; "but I will tell you that my signature has been imitated, and very badly, too, by your young friend. Look," added he, "if you doubt it, you need but examine him."

The unfortunate Paul had sunk down and hidden his face in his hands. Cambremer would willingly have denied the evidence before him, and he still hoped that this might be some new machination of M. Bousenna's, but this hope soon departed.

"I understand everything," resumed the banker. "Monsieur Vernier probably thought that this gentleman's threats would frighten me, and that I should say nothing as to his shameful conduct : but I will show him that he is mistaken in his calculations."

"What do you mean to do?" asked Cambremer, in a threatening tone.

"Oh, not much : I shall make a complaint to the police. If you still intend to denounce me, we can go together to the Prefecture."

Chevalier Casse-Cou turned as pale as death, and walked up to M. Bousenna. "You must give me this receipt," said he, looking him straight in the face.

M. Bousenna bore his gaze without flinching. "I will not return it to you," he replied, with icy calmness, "and I am astounded that you should ask me for it."

Chevalier Casse-Cou made a gesture as if he were about to throw himself upon his insolent adversary, but Madame Mongis stopped him.

"Sir," said she to the banker, "I do not know whether Monsieur Vernier has committed the act of which you accuse him, but you will admit that if he is guilty, I alone am the sufferer in the matter. It is I alone, then, who have the right to enter a complaint, and I beg of you—"

"Excuse me, madame, but I am obliged to tell you that you are strangely mistaken. A crime has been committed, and any honest citizen has not only the right to inform the police of it, but it is his duty to do so. The interests of society are involved, and where, in Heaven's name, should we all be if we closed our eyes to such things as this?"

In delivering this moral discourse, M. Bousenna had seen fit to assume the solemn nasal tone with which Monnier afterwards endowed the cele-

brated "Joseph Prud'homme." However, the widow did not allow herself to be taken in by this piece of acting.

"You are the master of your own actions, sir," she replied, calmly, "and you cannot deny that the receipt belongs to me, and that by keeping it you are committing a dishonest act yourself."

"Why? It matters little, since it is a forgery, whether it is in your pocket or mine. Besides, I have no reason to grant any request made to me in a house where I have been insulted and threatened. If I'm denounced, I wish to be able to prove to the magistrates what is the morality of those who accuse me."

"Ah! I understand," exclaimed Cambremer; "the scoundrel wishes to make a bargain with me. If I grant him impunity, he will give me back this paper."

"If such were my calculation," said the financier, with an evil smile, "you must confess that I should not be wholly wrong."

"Perhaps not," said the chevalier, in a loud voice; "but you forget that you are in my rooms, and that you cannot leave them without my permission."

Cambremer, in thus expressing himself, did not err as to his ability to detain the banker, for he had just taken a long sword from a panoply on the wall, and was flourishing it furiously.

"Very fine, indeed!" exclaimed M. Bousenna. "It seems that, although you call *me* a murderer, *you* wish to murder me. As you please, sir; but I warn you that you will not gain much by all this. It is known at my office that I came here to look for Monsieur Vernier, and if I delay too long in returning home, there will be persons coming here to find out what you have done with me."

"I do not wish to kill you, but I wish you to give me back that paper."

"And I tell you, that to have it, you will be obliged to run me through with that long spit that you handle so well; for I am stronger than you are, and so long as I have life in me, you will not succeed in getting it away from me."

This mocking coolness enraged Cambremer beyond measure, and he seemed about to fall upon M. Bousenna, without reflecting as to the disastrous consequences of such violence. But just as he was pushing Madame Mongis aside—for she had prudently placed herself between him and his enemy—the chevalier saw his young protégé rise from the arm-chair on to which he had previously sunk, as though completely overwhelmed. Paul Vernier had so far not uttered a word during the painful scene which he had caused, but his courage returned to him when he saw his protector rushing into danger on his account. He went straight up to M. Bousenna, and said to him in a firm voice: "I am guilty, and I am ready to bear all the consequences of my unpardonable weakness."

"You hear this confession, madame," interrupted the banker; "I warn you that I shall call upon you as a witness."

"It is idle, sir," resumed the young man, "for I shall not retract a word of my confession; but I declare that, although I have acted wrongly, it was you who caused me to do so."

"Indeed! Well, this is something new!" exclaimed M. Bousenna, shrugging his shoulders.

"I shall say that you laid an infamous trap for me. I shall state that I wished to hand you the money yesterday, when it was given to me, and that you refused to receive it, because you knew my unhappy

passion for gambling; and prepared everything so as to lead me into temptation."

"I really believe that you have lost your head, sir. If I had known that you were a gambler, you should not have remained a day in my employ."

"You were so well aware of it, that twice already you have placed me in the way of disgracing myself by confiding sums to me which you forced me to keep about me until the following day; when I brought the money back to you, your face betrayed your disappointment, for the vile woman who is your tool had previously told you that I had passed the night at Frascati's, and had lost all."

"Really, this is news to me, and it is lucky that chance acquaints me with your course of conduct," said the banker, with matchless impudence.

"Monsieur Cambremer will certify, if necessary, that I am speaking the truth," resumed Paul, "for he generously repaired my first fault. As to the second, I shall not attempt to excuse it, but I shall state what took place at the house in the Rue Basse du Rempart; I shall name your vile accomplice, that pretended Baron de Taulade, who was waiting with a gang of robbers to despoil me, and I shall relate that you sent me to that den of thieves. Let us go at once, Monsieur Bousenna; I am ready to go with you to the office of the nearest commissary of police."

After this bold outbreak on Paul's part, there was a moment's silence. Madame Mongis, the depths of whose heart was stirred, had tears in her eyes, and Cambremer wondered whether his young friend was not in the right, and whether it would not, indeed, be better at once to bring the matter before the police, that is, if the financier were willing to deal with the authorities.

"This story reminds me of the 'Arabian Nights,'" sneered M. Bousenna, with unblushing effrontery; "and I see but one thing in it all, and that is that it suits you to slander a respectable man who honours me with his friendship. You can tell all this romantic stuff to the commissary, but I doubt his believing it." Then, turning to Cambremer, who still held the sword in his hand, the banker added: "I suppose, sir, that after the excellent defence of your favourite here, you will see no objection to letting me go. Innocence so well established can have nothing to fear."

The chevalier, in spite of his determined character, at that moment felt all the tortures of uncertainty. On the one hand, he longed to end matters with the villain whom a providential chance had brought there; on the other, he could not hide it from himself that if the contest were carried on in legal fashion, the advantage might not be on the side of the good cause. Cambremer's perplexity was too visible in his face to fail to be apparent to the banker's discerning eyes. Bousenna immediately began to speak again, changing his tone with a facility that proved him to be a man of ready wits. "Well, sir," said he, mildly, "I have shown you the consequences that may arise from a struggle between us. I do not fear them for my part, and I don't prevent your denouncing my pretended crimes. I merely reserve the use of the weapon which I have in my hands; but as, in reality, I am not particularly anxious for the death of a sinner, as the phrase goes, I—"

"Express yourself clearly," interrupted Cambremer, "I have no time to guess what your meaning may be."

"Very well; so be it! I mean that if you come to the proper conclusion

to leave me in peace, I will abstain from entering any complaint against Monsieur Vernier. Let him take another situation; that is all I ask at present; but if I am attacked, I shall have a weapon at hand to defend myself."

Chevalier Casse-Cou was about to reply by an indignant refusal to engage in the bargain proposed to him, when there came a loud ring at the door. He had the good sense to wait and ascertain what visitor it was that thus announced himself, and as he did not wish to lose sight of M. Bousenna, he requested Madame Mongis to open the door. An instant later, Martha's mother ushered in an individual of mean appearance, whose face was utterly unknown to the residents in the Ruc Férou.

"Have I the honour of speaking to Monsieur Cambremer?" asked the new-comer.

"Yes, sir; what do you desire?" said the chevalier, curtly, who was greatly annoyed by this interruption.

"Well, sir," resumed the man, "I have come from the Prefecture of Police."

This announcement produced a marked effect upon all present. Cambremer's eyes sparkled, the banker's were lowered, as though to avoid meeting the eyes of the police agent; Madame Mongis felt agitated, and Paul turned lividly pale. They all explained this unexpected visit differently, but no one ventured to utter a word aloud.

"I am sent, sir," resumed the visitor, "to ask if you know an individual who gives his name as Jacques Courapiéd, *alias* Cassonade."

"Has anything happened to him?" exclaimed Cambremer.

"I shall be greatly obliged to you if you will answer the question which I have had the honour of addressing to you."

"Certainly, I know him; he is my neighbour, my friend, the best servant in the world."

"Yes, he asserted that he was in your service, and it is to verify his statements that I came here."

"But what in Heaven's name has happened to him?"

"Well, I see no reason for not telling you the facts of the case. This man was arrested last night on the Ile Louviers, and was not able to give any satisfactory explanation of his presence in the wood-yards, where a great many thefts have recently been committed."

"He is innocent; I answer for him as I would for myself."

"Well, you must say that to the commissary," replied the police agent, evasively; "but I won't hide from you that the man who calls himself Courapiéd was found to have a very large sum of money about him, in bank-notes."

"The ten thousand francs for Gévaudan," said Cambremer, heedlessly; "I gave them to him yesterday morning."

"Moreover, he was in company with three men whom he declares he doesn't know, but we are aware that they are professional criminals."

"The men who tried to kill me! What good luck! Through them we shall learn everything. Where are they?"

"Two of them have been killed by the fall of a pile of wood, and the third, who may not have three hours longer to live, has been taken to the Hôtel Dieu Hospital."

"And what of Cassonade?" said the chevalier, anxiously.

"Oh, he will get all right again; he's only bruised a little."

Cambremer gave a sigh of relief, reflected for a few moments as to what

he should do, and finally said to the police-agent: "Well, I will follow you to the Prefecture, but before I do so, I wish to tell you the name of the chief of the three malefactors whom you found on the Ile Louviers."

"Ah, sir!" said the detective, "you will do us a great service in that, for these men belong to a band which has long been known to us, but we have never yet been able to lay hands upon their leader."

While this dialogue was going on beside him, the banker was looking very unconcerned, so much so, indeed, that a suspicion crossed Cambremer's mind. He remembered the trap which had been laid for him the day before, and he had excellent reasons for fearing spurious police-agents. The idea entered his mind that the individual whom he was speaking to might have been sent by Bousenna, whose apparent calmness seemed to him very strange. However, when Cambremer looked closely at the man, he realised his mistake. Not only did this fellow lack the hypocritical ways of the men who had been with him in the carriage, but he had a stupid face, which did not admit of any suspicion that he was playing a false part. It was evident also that he did not belong to the active service, and that he must be simply a quiet clerk with the formidable administration installed in the Rue de Jérusalem.

Moreover, the fellow unconsciously set aside all the chevalier's prejudices by modestly exclaiming: "Your declaration, sir, will be highly important; but it would be better for you to make it in person at the Prefecture of Police. As for myself, I am merely the clerk of the commissariate office on the Ile Saint Louis."

"Did you come here alone?" asked Cambremer, suddenly.

"No; I have a man downstairs who was on duty with us."

"Where is he?"

"I told him to wait for me in the street, as I did not wish to attract remark to a respectable house."

"Then if it were necessary to effect an arrest, you have some one to help you?"

"Certainly; and I must tell you that the commissary sent him to be in readiness should any such emergency arise. This was not because he had even heard anything against you, but you are aware that one never knows what may happen, and upon my word I—"

"Well," exclaimed Cambremer, going towards M. Bousenna, "the matter stands in that way; I need merely point out a guilty party to you, and I—"

"There need be nothing said now of any arrest," said Madame Mongis, placing herself so as to hide the gestures of the two adversaries from the clerk; and as she spoke, the widow gave Cambremer a warning glance.

The scene in which five persons were now concerned, became a very singular one. As soon as M. Bousenna saw Madame Mongis interfere, he ceased moving or speaking, but remained in a threatening attitude; for his hand rested upon his pocket which contained a weapon much more dangerous than a dagger. Chevalier Casse-Cou saw that his neighbour was of the opinion that it would be best to accept the truce which his enemy had asked for, and he hesitated about denouncing him. Paul Vernier was waiting in the resigned attitude of a guilty man, waiting for the verdict of the jury who are deciding his fate.

As for the clerk of the commissariate office, his puzzled face showed that he did not understand the meaning of the interruption.

"Where is Monsieur Courapié at this moment?" asked Madame Mongis, who was desirous of putting an end to the trying position in which matters now stood.

"The man who was found in the wood-yard?" said the clerk; "well, he is at the office of the commissary, who has been questioning him for more than an hour, and who urged me to return here as soon as possible."

"Don't you think, Monsieur Francis," said Madame Mongis, who wished to turn this information to account at once, "don't you think that the best thing to do would be to go immediately and have the poor fellow set at liberty?"

The worthy woman had made the right appeal. When Cambremer thought of his dear squire, he was sure to forget everything and everyone else, and this time, as usual, the desired result was obtained. "Yes, indeed," exclaimed the chevalier, "I will go at once and prove his innocence. What I was going to say to this gentleman," he added, pointing to the clerk, and looking at the banker, "I will say to the commissary, and I am sure of being believed."

M. Bousenna understood perfectly well that this was a threat; but, to the great surprise of his adversary, he did not show the least apprehension, and even seemed greatly disposed to profit by the chance of ending a stormy interview. His calmness irritated Cambremer, and urged him to a more direct attack. "I presume that you will go with me to the commissary's," said he, in a hostile tone.

"Grieved to refuse, my dear sir," replied the financier, with perfect calmness; "but I must return to my business; I am expected at my office. Besides, I don't think that I should be of any great use to you in the little trip which you are about to make."

"No more jokes, if you please. You know very well that your presence is indispensable where I am going."

"Why so, my dear sir? Your personal respectability is more than sufficient to enable you to answer for this—this man—Cassonade, in whom you are so much interested, and, as I don't know him at all, I shouldn't be of any earthly use to you."

This odious twitting again aroused the chevalier's anger. "Shall I call the policeman to take you?" said he, going towards the window which overlooked the street where the representative of law and order was waiting.

Bousenna did not attempt to detain him, but he drew from his pocket a paper which he pretended to examine attentively.

"I am all the more unable to go with you to the Ile Saint Louis," said he, with incredible coolness, "as I have just found a very important paper in my pocket-book, and must at once return home to put it with my deeds."

There was no mistaking the double meaning of this remark, for Cambremer at once recognised the fatal receipt. Bousenna held the little slip of paper between his fingers, and everyone present who understood the true motive for his manoeuvre, realised that the banker was playing with the acknowledgment before making use of it, just as a cat plays with a mouse.

At this moment, however, the door opened, and Martha timidly showed her lovely face, which looked still more beautiful, on account of the emotion depicted on it.

It was not difficult to guess why she appeared. Indeed, by her paleness, and the anxiety to be detected in her eyes, it was easy to see that the

lengthy conference had frightened her. She had, perhaps, noticed all the going and coming that had taken place around the house, and caught sight of the policeman outside, and she had evidently come to see what was going on in her friend the chevalier's rooms; the presence of Paul Vernier having evidently had something to do with her indiscretion in thus appearing without being called.

Her poor lover would gladly have been far away, and no doubt would have preferred a prison, such as he was threatened with, to the cruel situation in which the young girl's arrival placed him. At the thought of confessing his shame before those whom he loved, his whole soul revolted, and he looked around him for a weapon with which he might destroy himself rather than continue enduring such terrible torture.

Martha, on her side, lacked the time to open her lips to explain what she had come for, as her mother made haste to speak. Madame Mongis wished above all things else to save Paul, and she felt that Heaven had sent Martha to help her. Cambremer was well aware of the love of the young people for one another, and he was too kind-hearted to wish his young charge to be humiliated in the presence of his beloved.

"My daughter has come to remind me that our dear Baïa needs me," said the widow; "I think, my dear neighbour, that it is time for you to go to the Ile Saint Louis."

She emphasized her words with so eloquent a look that Cambremer's resolution was shaken. To accuse Bousenna at once would mean sentencing Paul Vernier to death, for the young fellow's features fully expressed his determination not to survive if his employer replied by accusing him, which was a foregone conclusion. On the other hand, the result of the struggle thus begun would be very doubtful; for, in the presence of two contrary accusations, the commissary's clerk would not fail to refer the matter to his superiors.

It would be necessary to go before the officials, conflicting charges would be brought forward, and Bousenna was so crafty that it was quite possible that he would ultimately prevail.

On the other hand, by letting his enemy go, Cambremer gained precious time, the time required to explain to the authorities who held Cassonade how the whole affair had originated, and, to get together evidence of an unimpeachable kind.

Was there not one of the ruffians now at the Hôtel Dieu Hospital? Might he not be questioned and might he not make up his mind to confess everything before dying? The chevalier said to himself that he would be more strongly armed against this Bousenna-Biroulas when he had proved the rascal's criminal antecedents to the authorities. Nothing would then prevent him from telling the magistrates—thus enlightened—the whole story of Paul's unfortunate adventure, and urging that there were extenuating circumstances in his favour.

It occurred to him, moreover, that an established banker, well known in the neighbourhood where he lived, and doing a great deal of business, could not disappear like a mere nobody, and that M. Bousenna would be easy to find, especially if, so as to mislead him, one pretended to accept his terms. The chevalier reasoned in this style in much less time than it takes to tell it. "You are right, sir," said he to the banker, "I can dispense with your attendance to-day, and I will no longer detain you."

"A thousand thanks," replied the banker, with an easy air; "I will go home and place this paper in a safe place," he added, putting the receipt

into his pocket again ; " however, I beg of you to believe, my dear sir, that I am entirely at your orders."

Then, after carelessly bowing to Madame Mongis and her daughter, M. Bousenna went off at a leisurely pace.

IV

IN WHICH WE LEARN HOW BALUCHON EXPIRED A SECOND TOO SOON.

SOME hours after this stormy interview, three men might have been seen going up the steps which led to the mournful-looking entrance of the Hôtel Dieu Hospital. Cambremer was supporting the faithful Cassonade, who walked somewhat feebly, owing to his terrible fall on the night before. A serious-looking man accompanied the pair, and it was easy to see from his black coat and white cravat that he was a functionary.

The little party was followed to the foot of the steps by two individuals of rather shabby appearance, who discreetly remained outside. A discerning observer would have at once conjectured that they were detectives, and such indeed they were.

Chevalier Casse-Cou's affairs had gone on wonderfully well since he had made up his mind to let M. Bousenna leave, and he had every reason to congratulate himself on having resorted to mild measures. He had the pleasure, in the first place, of seeing Paul Vernier become calm again, and of obtaining from him a solemn promise that he would not commit suicide. He had admonished him in so kind a tone that the poor young fellow had burst into tears, and had sworn to devote his life to atoning for his error.

While this was going on, Madame Mongis had taken care to keep her daughter busy, so as to engross her attention, and Martha, although she realised that something unusual had occurred, did not dream that her lover had committed any serious transgression. Cambremer had not the heart, in point of fact, to be very angry with his young charge, for he had divined that some odious plot had brought about all that had happened. So he contented himself with locking him into his rooms, and telling him that he would come to let him out before the day ended.

His neighbours went back to their own apartments, where it would have been imprudent to leave Baïa alone, and the chevalier, feeling reassured, then repaired with the clerk to the commissary's office on the Ile Saint Louis.

He not only had the pleasure of finding Cassonade there, but he also had the good luck to meet an intelligent and kind-hearted official. His previous relations with the functionaries of the redoubtable administration of the Rue de Jérusalem had not been over agreeable; and on entering the commissary's office, he remembered the strange behaviour of two of that functionary's colleagues.

He soon felt reassured, however, for this time he had to deal with a man who listened to him with great attention, asked him some very judicious questions, and, after an interrogatory of more than an hour, promised to assist him in his campaign against Bousenna. " We have long been looking," said the able functionary, " for a clue to the proceedings of a band of scoundrels whose misdeeds have frightened many parts of Paris and the suburbs."

Cambremer's narrative, as it turned out, agreed in many respects with

the information already furnished by several detectives as to the previous exploits of the gang. The story of the vault at the Barrière d'Enfer, for instance, was perfectly well known, and the police were also aware that the mysterious leader of the band concealed his identity under some assumed name or other, and had a large amount of money at his disposal.

The commissary may, perhaps, have thought that what related to the scene at the Odéon was purely imaginary; however, the hope of making an important arrest decided him to act without losing an instant. Cambremer had told him everything, even the criminal weakness of his friend Paul, and had entered into the most precise details as to the habits of M. Bousenna, not forgetting to mention his connection with M. de Taulade. It was, however, a very delicate matter to arrest a rich financier, and, before doing so, the magistrate wished to try and obtain still stronger evidence of his guilt by questioning the sole survivor of the accident which had happened on the Ile Louviers.

The Hôtel-Dieu Hospital was near by, and he thought best to go there at once. It is needless to say that he was accompanied by Cambremer and Cassonade, who were indispensable auxiliaries, for they must needs be confronted with the injured man; and, moreover, the commissary took two police agents with him to be on hand should occasion require.

The doors of the hospital opened wide to the three persons who had thus come to fulfil a judicial mission, and they were at once escorted to the bedside of the injured man. The wretch had been taken up half dead from beneath a pile of logs, and had at once been sent to the surgical department; so the visitors were led to one of the rooms on the ground floor, where the illustrious Dupuytren then practised.

On setting foot in this melancholy place, Cambremer felt his heart sink. He had never seen any hospital except the army ambulance, where he had nearly died at the Morea, and he did not entertain any painful remembrance of his sojourn in the large house built in the Oriental style, and lighted by the sun of Greece, where he had then been tended. But air, space, and blue sky were utterly wanting in the long gallery at the end of which lay the dying man whom he had come to question. The high, grated windows, the massive columns supporting the arches of the vaulted roof, made the place seem to him like a prison.

The director of the hospital had been informed of the intended visit, and he led the commissary and his companions between two long files of iron beds uniformly hung with white curtains, which betokened equality in suffering. The chevalier, who was greatly moved, saw the same pale-faced patients looking at the visitors with a curiosity born of weariness. Around two or three beds the curtains were closely drawn. He understood that death had visited them, and quickly passed on. At the further end a man lay upon a bed, near which sat one of the hospital doctors, who had a red cap upon his head and a white apron tied about his waist. He was holding one of the sick man's wrists and feeling his pulse, while a priest knelt at the foot of the bed in the attitude of prayer.

"I am afraid that you have come too late," whispered the director to the commissary.

Although the features of the dying man were greatly altered, Cambremer at once recognised him as one of the ruffians who had gagged him, and Cassonade uttered his name in a low tone, for he well remembered the individual who had been stationed to watch for him on the Quai de Béthune, and whom his companions had called Baluchon. The unfortunate man

also remembered the faces of the chevalier and his squire, for he turned paler still, and closed his eyes as if at sight of them he were anxious to avoid meeting their gaze.

"Is he in a condition to be questioned?" asked the director of the young doctor, who had left the bedside for a moment.

"Yes, if it does not last too long," was the reply. "There is a fracture of the spinal column; the lower limbs are already cold, and in half-an-hour, or an hour at the most, all will be over. However, he is still perfectly conscious."

"The question is whether he will be willing to reply," muttered the commissary.

"I think that he will, for he has just confessed to the priest, and he says that he is penitent."

The chaplain, who had finished saying the prayers for the dying, now rose up and came to the visitors. "This man is a great sinner," said he, in a low voice; "but I hope that heaven will pardon him, and I am sure that he will not refuse to renew in your presence the confession which I have just heard."

The official lost no time, and began the questioning by asking the poor devil who he was. He replied in a low but still distinct tone, that his name was really Baluchon, that he had been born at Belleville, and had never followed any honest avocation. He admitted that he had lived by swindling, fraud and theft, with weapon in hand. He neither denied the kidnapping of the gentleman before him nor the intention of himself and his mates to throw him into the Seine.

Cambremer listened to all his replies with feverish attention. They were now coming to the most interesting part of the inquiry, and the commissary began to question the fellow concerning M. Bousenna. But either the dying man was less willing to explain himself on this point or else the questions were not properly put; at all events, his language grew more obscure. It was evident that he thought it idle to bring into his confession facts which were foreign to himself, and that he did not care to tell the law what he had concealed from the confessor. However, the chaplain, who was listening to the evidence, now came near the dying man, took hold of his hand, and said to him in a gentle tone: "My son, be truthful, and Heaven will reward you for your frankness."

The face of the unhappy man flushed for a moment, and a convulsive shudder shook his whole body. "What do you wish me to tell you?" he murmured in a feeble voice; "I have stolen and I have killed. I confess it and I repent, but Heaven does not order me to betray others."

These words were spoken with so much simplicity that those present looked at one another with the same thought visible on all their faces. Who could constrain a man who was about to appear before the Supreme Judge to injure his neighbour, however criminal the latter might be? Nevertheless, the commissary drew the chaplain aside, and begged him to make the attempt. But the venerable priest shook his head sadly and declared that he did not wish to make the guilty man confess anything more. "I might obtain more explicit avowals by making him speak further," said he, "but his replies would belong to the secrets of the confessional which it is forbidden me to reveal."

This reply, given in a firm tone, curtailed the official's insistence.

"Make haste, gentlemen," now said the young doctor, who was watching

the sick man's face ; " the paralysis is progressing, and in another moment he may be unable to speak."

Cambremer at that moment felt like a Californian miner, who, after discovering a precious nugget, suddenly sees it sink into the water. The dark enigma which he had sought to penetrate at the peril of his life was again about to escape him at the very moment when he had thought himself on the point of solving it. The sphinx was about to die without having spoken.

" Shall I try to question this unhappy man myself ? " he asked, leaning towards the commissary.

" Oh, you can do so if you like," said the latter, with an air of indifference.

Chevalier Casse-Cou approached the bed and looked fixedly at the dying man, whose eyes were already growing dim. " Do you recognise me," he asked, gently.

" Yes, I recognise you, and I beg you to forgive me."

" I forgive you ; you were merely the tool of a scoundrel, and it is he who will answer to Heaven for the crimes he planned. Tell me his name."

The dying man's features became contracted.

" Where is Pavard ? " muttered he, in a fainter tone, " where is Pavard ? "

The name of Pavard failed to enlighten Cambremer. Whilst he was in the carriage with Bousenna's hirelings he had not given a thought to their names. Gagged and bound as he was, all that he could do was to listen. Moreover, the man Pavard had played the coachman that night, and nothing had been said about him except at the tavern of the " *Lapin-qui-Saute*." Now, poor Cambremer had been groaning upon the cushions of the carriage while Cassonade and Morillon were seated in Madame Riffard's establishment. Thus, when he heard the dying man speak of an unknown person, he thought that he was referring to the head of the gang. " Is that the true name of the man who has committed so many crimes ? " said he.

But the squire spoke up on hearing this, and remarked : " No, no ; Pavard is the tall rascal whom Morillon kicked as he was leaping on to the box, and who hung on behind the carriage."

" Yes," murmured the unfortunate Baluchon, in a feeble voice, " I saw him go away with the carriage. Where is he ? Has he been caught ? "

It was evident enough that the fate of the man named Pavard greatly interested him, and that he meant to regulate his confession according to the news he might hear of his comrade. The commissary of police, who had learned by experience what to do in such cases, considered it best to declare at once that Pavard was arrested. As a general rule, rascals are all the more willing to speak when they think that their associates have already done so. So the commissary made ready to try this old trick, which consists in telling a lie to ascertain the truth.

However, Cambremer, who was not acquainted with the tricks of the police, now spoke up. " No ; he has not been arrested," said he ; " he got possession of the carriage, and has baffled all pursuit. You alone can tell us the true story of your leader, the villain who hides himself after abandoning you to the terrible situation to which he has brought you."

" Hush ! " said the commissary in a low tone, and pulling at the tail of Cambremer's coat.

However, the simple frankness of the chevalier had accomplished what all the administrative diplomacy of the magistrate had failed to effect.

" Is what you tell me true ? " faintly asked the dying man.

" Yes," said Cambremer, in surprise.

"You swear to me that Pavard is safe?"

"I give you my word of honour that he disappeared when I was delivered, and has not been found since."

"He may be caught, though," muttered the commissary.

Fortunately, Baluchon did not overhear this remark, for the threat would undoubtedly have closed his mouth. "Oh, if he has so far escaped," said he, slowly, "he is cunning enough to keep out of the way for good; he must have left Paris already, and I may speak out."

"You know, my man, that the judges always think a great deal of a confession," interrupted the magistrate.

"That isn't why I speak out," replied Baluchon with a bitter smile; "I can't be tried when I am dead; but, you see, when a fellow's going to another world he doesn't know what he may find there."

"You will find God there, my son," said the chaplain, solemnly, "God, who reads the heart and weighs the acts of man."

"Well, I have sins enough to be forgiven, and I don't want to die without telling you what ought to be done to prevent the old man from continuing the life that he is leading here."

"The old man is Bousenna," said Cambremer, in a low tone.

"However," continued the dying man, "I didn't fancy leaving Pavard in the lurch, because, you see, he once got me out of the clutches of your detectives. But if he's all right, I don't mind about the rest—"

"Well, first tell us the real name of the person whom you call the old man," said Chevalier Casse-Cou, in a state of agitation which he vainly attempted to hide.

"Oh! that's impossible. He has ten names, if not twenty."

"But he called himself Biroulas when he was smuggling at the Barrière d'Enfer, and he calls himself Bousenna when he plays the banker on the Boulevard Bonne Nouvelle, does he not?"

"Yes; I think that's about it; but that isn't all. The old 'un changes his name just as he changes his face, and he has as many names as he has houses."

"Then he is at the head of a vast association of smugglers?"

"In Paris, yes; but in the provinces he works in another way."

"In the provinces!" exclaimed Cambremer, who immediately remembered the nameless château recognised by Baïa in the famous engraving; "in what provinces?"

"Down there on the seashore—I can't tell you exactly where—he never employed me outside of Paris."

"But what can he be at on the coast?"

"Smuggling and—and politics."

At this very unexpected answer, the commissary pricked up his ears, and drew closer to the bed where the poor devil lay. "What kind of politics?—guerrilla politics, I suppose?" he said, eagerly.

"That may be; I don't know. In fact, I know nothing of all this," replied the wounded man, so frankly that no one doubted his sincerity.

He had no appearance of being an insurgent, and it was probable that his mysterious leader employed two different sets of men, according as he worked in Paris or on the seashore.

"Make haste; his speech is thickening!" whispered the young doctor, who had kept his eyes upon the patient.

This warning acted like a goad upon Cambremer, and it urged him to continue the interrogatory, and to revert once more to the subject that

interested him the most. "My friend," said he, taking the dying man's hand, "I don't wish to fatigue you, and I have but one thing more to ask you, and I beg of you to reply distinctly and tell me all that you know."

"I don't know much, for the old man did not tell us his affairs, still—I will not lie when I am dying."

"Do you know anything concerning a young woman and a little girl whom Bousenna brought to Paris about two weeks ago?"

"Yes; it was Pavard who went to wait for them at the Passy gate. They came to Paris by post-chaise; and they went to the Rue Sainte Barbe to Mother Hippolyte's lodging-house."

"Did he take them to the Odéon Theatre that night?"

"I cannot tell you. All that I know is, that they only remained a day or two in Paris."

"And you do not know where they came from, nor who they were?"

"No; but it's likely that they belonged to the master's family, for Pavard told me that he had orders to use them well."

Scarcely had the wounded man uttered these words, when he was taken with suffocation, followed by a convulsive hiccough. It was evident that he had but a few moments more to live. Cambremer's compassionate nature made him suffer in being forced to question a dying man, although he did so for most praiseworthy reasons. He was obliged to make a great effort to continue the questioning, but the cause of his dear Baia was a holy one, and he could not desert it.

"Did you never meet a young woman at your master's house," said he, leaning over the dying man—"a woman with a very dark complexion, very pale, and almost always dressed like a man, and who went across the yard yesterday when Bousenna came from his office?"

"Oh, yes! the woman dressed like a man! She is the—the old un's mistress; she's called Yamina."

This information was not very explicit, but it had its value, and Cambremer noted it carefully in his memory. "She killed Kaddour, did she not?" said he, without reflecting that the clearness of the dying man's mind was departing, and that it was not well to confuse him by asking too many questions.

It was, indeed, a great mistake; for from this moment the answers came more and more confused. "Kaddour!" repeated the dying man; "I don't know him—ain't he Mother Hippolyte's man—no—she is a widow, the old wretch!—or, is it the little fellow who is employed at the master's house—the one they must have trapped last night?"

It was easy to guess that this was a reference to Paul Vernier, and the cause of the hatred with which M. Bousenna pursued the young man was still a point that Cambremer had not yet found out. So he caught at the dying man's last words, and asked him in a trembling voice: "What did he ever do to injure your master—that young clerk whom he wishes to ruin?"

"Is was not he—not the little fellow. It seems that his father—long ago—was the master's friend—and they had—business together—"

"Finish what you are saying," said Cambremer, with the utmost anxiety.

Unfortunately, Baluchon was not able to do so. His mouth became contracted, his eyes grew hollow and fixed. The last agonies were beginning. "It is all over," said the doctor, on hearing which the chaplain knelt down at the foot of the bed. The dying man, meantime, was trying to utter a few words, but they were incoherent ones.

"Be on your guard!" he finally gasped, in a voice like a death-rattle; "the old man is cunning—he can disguise himself as he likes—and when you fancy that he has left Paris, he will still be here—there is the Rue Basse—and, besides, the Rue—de la—"

A final convulsion made the unfortunate fellow writhe; paralysis had now reached the throat, and life departed with a hoarse cry. He died without being able to utter the word that would perhaps have revealed Biroulas's true abode. All human passions grow calm in the presence of death. Cambremer, who was watching the lips of Bousenna's unfortunate satellite, felt something like remorse when he saw him expire. He reproached himself with having troubled the dying moments of a man who was penitent, although guilty, and he would willingly have followed the example of the chaplain who was praying on his knees for the repose of the soul laden with so much sin. Cassonade himself, in spite of the personal reasons which he had for feeling a grudge against Baluchon, was moved to tears. As for the director of the hospital and the young doctor, they were too accustomed to such sights to be much affected by the spectacle of death; however, they exchanged looks in which pity was evident.

The commissary alone, who was entirely hardened against emotion from long practice of his professional duty, looked on without emotion at the poor scamp's last moments. He then drew the four men present aside, and said to them in a low tone: "You will have to sign the report to-night. I will write it out at my office; at present, the most urgent matter is to repair to the house of this fellow Bousenna."

No one made any objection, and the party left the room where the priest was still praying. When they were at the door, Cambremer, after taking leave of the director, said to the commissary: "I ask you, as a favour, sir, to let me go with you to this man Bousenna's house."

"I wish you to do so," replied the magistrate, "and it is no favour that I do you in taking you there, for your information may be very useful to me."

"I think, too," resumed the chevalier, "that we shall also need my friend Cassonade; and if you see no objection to it, I—"

"There is none, and I am even very glad to be able to confront this worthy man with the sham banker. We will all three get into a cab, my two men will follow in another, and in an hour's time I hope our fellow will be caged."

"If he has not taken it into his head to abscond," muttered Cambremer.

"That is very unlikely, as he thinks that he has you in his power through the famous receipt on which his signature was penned. And, by-the-bye, that foolish young chat who has got himself into this bad scrape wouldn't be in our way if he came with us on our visit to his employer's office."

"Well, he is waiting for me at my lodgings, and there is nothing to prevent us from going to the Rue Férou and taking him with us."

"That is what we will do," said the commissary, calling to the two police-agents, who were on the look-out on the Parvis Notre Dame. He soon finished giving them his instructions, and five minutes later, the two cabs containing the avengers of the crime of the Odéon were rolling along towards the Faubourg Saint Germain.

Cambremer did not open his lips during the drive. He was too anxious to talk; for, on the one hand, he was trying to classify in his mind the incomplete information received from the dying man, and, on the other, he felt troubled as to what might befall Paul Vernier in the midst of all that

would now ensue. The commissary's insistence as to taking the young fellow with them had alarmed him, but it was now too late to draw back.

They soon reached the Rue Férou, and Cassonade was sent to the chevalier's rooms where Martha's lover was sadly waiting for the return of his friends. Paul came down at once, and seated himself on the front seat of the vehicle. Cambremer silently pressed his hand, and the commissary looked at him with a gaze calculated to read his mind and heart.

The poor boy said nothing ; but it was easy to see that he thought that he was being arrested in earnest. However, Cassonade, who was seated beside him, was not a man to keep silent even in the presence of a police official. "Ah, Monsieur Paul !" said he, as soon as they had started once more, "we owe a great many thanks to the commissary. He knows what he is about, and will rid us of your fine employer. He is not like his fellow-functionary, my old master, who would not believe us on the day of the affair at the Odéon, and—"

"Say no more, my man," interrupted the magistrate, who wished to show due respect for his colleagues, "my fellow-magistrate was right in taking time, for he did not know what I now have learned. Besides, we must not think ourselves victorious till we have arrested this Bousenna, who seems to me a very cunning scamp. Come, young man," added he, addressing Paul Vernier, "tell me what you know of your employer's habits."

Paul did not understand why he was so graciously addressed, and tears filled his eyes at the thought that it might be due to Chevalier Casse-Cou's kindness.

"Well," resumed the commissary, "do you think that we shall find him at his office?"

"Oh, undoubtedly, sir," replied the dismissed secretary, timidly ; "since I have been in his employ, he has never left his office before five."

"What does he usually do in the evening?"

"I know nothing whatever about that, sir ; but I have reasons for thinking that he is away at night ; at least, as soon as the day's work is over, the office is closed until the next day."

"This banker is rich enough to have several servants, eh?"

"Oh ! I have never seen any except an office-boy, who sweeps up and runs errands."

"Then Monsieur Bousenna must have another place where he sleeps."

"Yes ; that's very probable ; for the second floor, where we work, is only composed of three rooms, including his private office."

"Do you know the other clerks?"

"Very little, sir ; my work consists in verifying accounts and copying letters under the eyes of my employer, and I have scarcely ever entered the office where the other clerks work."

"He no doubt had his reasons for keeping you away from them ; for I suspect that these pretty fellows belong to the gang. What kind of looking men are they?"

"All that I ever remarked is that they are all middle-aged and very taciturn."

"This confirms my opinion, and I think that we shall haul in a net full of fish ; however, we shall need extra assistance, for, with such chaps as those, my two officers wouldn't be able to do much ; but, by the way, I will send to the guard-house on the boulevard, and four men and a corporal will come to me at once."

"Don't you think, sir," asked Cambremer, "that it would be worth while watching the place in the Rue Sainte Barbe as well? Bousenna has some understanding with the frightful hag who keeps that den, and it would be very easy for him to escape that way."

"Do you think that I have forgotten about that?" said the commissary, with a smile. "It is the first thing that we do when a house has two exits, and I'll guarantee that this man Bousenna will be surrounded according to rule."

"And you would do as well to arrest that janitress also ; she is merely his tool."

"That will follow in due course, but we will begin by the banker. The biggest fish first. You see, my dear sir, that in matters as complicated as this one, the leader must be got at to begin with ; when once we have him, the minors are apt to run in the way of danger, like moths around a candle. We set what we call a mouse-trap at the house of the leader, and we catch them all in a couple of days or so."

"I hope that the fiendish creature with the red camellia will run into it," muttered Cassonade, who felt very bitterly inclined toward the mysterious being about whom his master had so often spoken.

"Oh, as to that one," replied the functionary indifferently, "I must question Monsieur Vernier later on."

Paul blushed up to his ears, and all his anxiety returned to him.

"Call out to the coachman, my man," said the magistrate to Cassonade ; "and tell him to stop. We are on the boulevard, and it is useless to make a stir just in front of Monsieur Bousenna's house. There's no harm done in taking precautions."

The order was executed, and they all got out at the corner of the Rue Poissonnière. The commissary had a short conference with his agents, who had hastily alighted from the second cab, and he made his arrangements with a deal of sagacity.

One of his men was told to go to the Rue Sainte Barbe, while the other went to the guard-house for reinforcements. "As soon as your squad is ready," said the official, "you must send two men to your comrade, and with the corporal and the other two, you must watch the main door which opens upon the boulevard."

Having thus organised everything according to the rules of strategy, the commissary turned towards the house under suspicion.

"Young man," said he to Paul Vernier, "when we reach the vestibule, you must go in first and engage in some sort of conversation with your master, while we take up our position on the landing. If you see anything out of the way in the behaviour of this man Bousenna, you must call us ; but it is probable that our man won't suspect anything, and that he will merely ask you why you have come to him after the scene of this morning. Then you must say anything that comes into your head until we enter. When he sees me, I'll warrant that he'll change his tone."

Paul listened attentively to these sagacious instructions, and promised to obey them in every respect. They crossed the courtyard ; and the door-keeper, who was accustomed to seeing a number of people going in and out of the house—in which business of various descriptions was transacted—did not disturb himself to ask the visitors where they were bound. The banker's offices were reached by a somewhat narrow staircase, which opened on the left-hand side of the main building at the end of the yard.

"How is the front door opened?" asked the commissary, as they went up.

"By a simple knob, which you turn round; it moves an inner bell," replied Paul.

"Well and good! Everything will go on wheels, as the saying is."

When they reached the landing, the commissary, Cambremer, and Cassonade ranged themselves in silence against the wall. Paul Vernier went in, and the door closed after him.

It was not without some apprehension that he turned the knob of the door which he had so often opened when bent on resuming his daily toil. The bell rang with a clear sound, and, either because he was nervous or by a mere fancy, M. Bousenna's secretary seemed to hear an echo that lasted longer than usual.

The apartment which he had entered served as a waiting-room, and as a rule, was occupied by a broad-shouldered fellow, who did duty as an office attendant. The straw chair where he habitually sat, before a table of dark wood, was upset upon the floor, and the inkstand also having been overthrown, the ink had poured forth over a sheet of paper upon which the names of people calling during the banker's absence were to have been taken down. All this disorder seemed to be the result of a hasty departure, and what confirmed this suspicion on Paul's part, was the fact that the dark-blue coat and the office-cap of the waiting-room attendant had been thrown behind the door.

Paul, much surprised and almost alarmed at the fellow's absence, needed all the courage that he could muster to push open the folding-door which led to his employer's private room. This, like the first apartment, was deserted. The elegant dressing gown, of an elaborate design, which M. Bousenna wore when receiving visitors was hung upon a hook; the floor was strewn with torn paper, and in the chimney-place, where a good fire was still burning, a ledger was being reduced to ashes. A still more significant detail was that the safe—an enormous iron coffer fixed to the wall—was open, and upon the shelves inside there were some stray louis and five-franc pieces. These forgotten coins showed how rapidly the place must have been abandoned, for the banker was very niggardly, and, as a rule, never left money lying about. Vernier could not believe his eyes, but went to inspect the plain wooden desk at which he used to take his seat every morning to copy letters, and think of Martha Mongis.

Here everything seemed undisturbed, and a large sheet of pasteboard, which served him as a hand-rest, lay as usual between a bundle of quills and a sand-box. However, something had been written upon it; and indeed, right across it, the young man saw these words traced in large letters: "Paul Vernier is a forger."

The poor lad who had leant forward to read this inscription, rose up and sprang back, as though a snake had bitten him. The paper recalled his sin to him, and the writing on the wall which appeared to Belshazzar at the feast, could not have terrified the Assyrian king more than this short but terrible phrase frightened the dismissed secretary.

On reflection he said to himself that it would be as wise to burn up this accusing paper, and he threw it among his employer's books in the fire. Then he hastened to the glass window which separated the private room from the general office where his clerks wrote from morning till night.

He tapped on the glass, but obtained no reply. He listened, and failed to hear the rustling of paper and scratching of pens which habitually form

the predominant sounds in an office. Had the clerks' workroom been deserted like the rest of the apartments? Paul was anxious to find out, and so he opened the communicating door at once.

The room was empty, and the fire of the stove by which it was usually warmed, had just gone out, leaving an offensive smoke behind.

The brass-bound covers of several books still lay upon a high desk, but the leaves had been torn out and undoubtedly consumed. Remains of lunches and fragments of pipes together with numerous wine-stains embellished the tables, as though the clerks had indulged in a final orgy before making off. There was no room for doubt. The place had been deserted for good. There was not a sound to be heard. One might have thought oneself in the palace of the Sleeping Beauty.

Paul Vernier did not deliberate very long as to the course to pursue. He had seen enough; and without giving himself the trouble to search for any traces of M. Bousenna and his accomplices, he went to call the friends who were waiting for him upon the landing.

"Well?" said the commissary, when he saw him reappear.

"There's no one here!"

"No one? Impossible! All those scoundrels cannot have flown away like a flock of ravens."

"I assure you, sir, that the office is empty."

Cambremer was fairly exasperated by this fresh disappointment, and he struck his forehead, exclaiming: "I feared this. That is what comes of my letting him go this morning!"

Cassonade on his side began to swear like a trooper, while the commissary scratched his chin with a pensive air.

Paul seemed to share the general disappointment, but in reality he was far from sorry to find that the enemy had disappeared. He had not forgotten that the unscrupulous Bousenna had the fatal receipt in his pocket-book, and he congratulated himself upon having destroyed the insolent inscription which had called up the remembrance of the transgression of which he so bitterly repented. The Parthian arrow, sped by the fugitive banker, seemed to indicate that he would never return, and Paul thought that he might consider himself safe.

"Let us go in," said the commissary; "for I may have sharper eyes than yours. I have not been using them for twenty years without improving their keenness."

With this self-sufficient remark, the official turned the knob and went into the office. Cambremer and Cassonade quickly followed, while Paul showed the way. Whatever experience the commissary might possess, he did not discover anything more than the young fellow had done. The waiting-room and the clerks' office were closely examined; but all the indications found there were useless as clues.

The functionary vainly examined some scattered papers, and even tried to piece them together, in the hope of discovering something from them. But the mystery of this sudden flight remained unsolved.

The official left M. Bousenna's private room till the last. He then seized hold of the showy dressing-gown, and ransacked the pockets without finding anything in them whatever; he counted the money scattered over the shelves of the open safe, but this arithmetical operation did not throw the least ray of light upon the cause of the banker's flight. Finally, however, he uttered a cry of delight, at sight of a large sheet of cardboard covered with huge letters, and set up at the foot of the wall. "Oho!" said he, after

reading the writing on it, "it seems, young man, that your employer insists upon bidding you good-bye!"

The dismissed secretary came up and almost fell to the floor, for the terrible words, "Paul Vernier is a forger," were once more visible.

"The scamp!" exclaimed Cambremer, "he longed to do harm, even after his disappearance."

The commissary turned and twisted the placard, and shook his head with an ominous air. The ugly story had been told him in all its particulars, and by Chevalier Casse-Cou himself, but Paul was not aware of this, and he felt greatly alarmed. He was somewhat comforted, however, by hearing the magistrate quietly remark:

"This proves that the rascal expected us."

This was true; for this anonymous denunciation would not have been written if M. Bousenna had not thought that it would be read by those whom it concerned.

Paul Vernier saw something else in it. He was sure, perfectly sure, that he had buried the paper which he had found upon his desk. How had the writing risen from its own ashes? This was, indeed, a miracle! He thought, for an instant, that the paper might be another one which had escaped him at first; but, on reflection, this seemed to him utterly impossible. The accusing words were most conspicuous; the placard rested against the wall, like a warning to beware of fresh paint.

It would seem as though M. Bousenna had succeeded during Paul's short absence in quietly entering the empty room, and had indulged in this spiteful joke. However, the banker was no sylph; he could not come in by the window, or fly up the chimney, and the supposition was absurd, unless, indeed, the wall had opened to admit him. Now, this wall was covered with a neat green paper which showed no break. Nevertheless, Paul Vernier examined it with mingled attention and terror. He also went stealthily up to the mysterious wall, and began to feel it quietly, but his fingers did not detect the least unevenness. It was as smooth and as firm as the wall of a prison.

"Come, young man," said the commissary to him; "we are not playing a melodrama, and it is only at the Ambigu that you find houses full of traps and secret doors. Let that wall alone, for it won't reveal anything; and come with us to make a search in the Rue Sainte Barbe."

"Yes," exclaimed Cambremer, "that is where the scamp has taken refuge, and by not losing a moment we can—"

"Oh, don't rely upon that, my dear sir," said the commissary; "we have to deal with a very cunning fellow, and the scamp isn't so foolish as to remain near his own house; but I hope that we shall be able to catch that old hag who is his accomplice."

There was no reply possible, under the circumstances, and they all hurried down the stairs, and found the detective who had been left at the door together with a corporal and two men. The commissary gave his subordinate orders to station himself in the rooms on the second floor so as to arrest all who might appear there. The doorkeeper, whom he intended to question later on, was called to lead the squad; and at sight of the official scarf, he obeyed without a word.

A sentry was left in the yard to guard the communications with the lodging-house, and they reached the Rue Sainte Barbe, going round by the boulevard side. At the entrance of Mother Hippolyte's den they found another agent who was talking quietly with the men under him, while he

kept his eye upon the door of the house which he had been sent to watch. "Have you seen anything suspicious?" asked the commissary.

"Nothing, sir. No one has come in, and no one has gone out, excepting an old woman with a black cat."

"It was she!" exclaimed Cambremer.

"If she took her cat away with her, she cannot intend to return," added Cassonade, who knew the ways of doorkeepers.

"What! you fool! you didn't stop that woman?" exclaimed the commissary.

"I had no orders to stop her," stammered the detective, in consternation at the mistake he had made.

"You ought at least to have followed her!"

"I was alone; and you told me not to leave the door."

This was unanswerable, and the official was obliged to admit, too late, that he had been overhasty in finding fault.

"Is it long since she went out?" asked the ever-practical Cassonade.

"About half-an-hour; you had not been gone five minutes when she went down the street."

"Which way did she go?"

"She turned to the left, towards the Boulevard Poissonnière, but she must be far off by now."

"We have no luck at all!" muttered Cambremer.

"We must not lose any time in talking," said the commissary; "there is nothing to show that this woman won't return, and I shall, at all events, have her place watched."

"The fact is," resumed Chevalier Casse-Cou, "that a search would be utterly useless. I know by experience that nothing can be learned from the boarders in the lodging-house, and it would be better to look elsewhere."

"Yes, but where?" demanded Cassonade.

Paul Vernier had an idea; he remembered the evening he had spent at the house in the Rue Basse-du-Rempart, and he thought that his former employer might have taken refuge with the strange baron who was so dexterous a gambler and who assisted him in carrying out some of his infamous schemes. However, the young fellow shrank from telling his own weaknesses, and to point out M. de Taulade, it would be necessary to confess everything. He now knew that the commissary was acquainted with the story of the forgery, but he did not know how far he was acquainted with the circumstances which had led to it. However, Cambremer put an end to his uncertainty by suddenly saying: "Paul, you must at once take us to the house of the man who robbed you yesterday, at play. Through him, we shall catch the rest of them."

"You are right," said the commissary; "I will have a watch kept at the lodging-house, here, and we will go to the Rue Basse."

"But it may be imprudent to present ourselves there unarmed," remarked Cassonade, sagaciously.

"I will get some of the men at the guard-house near the Opéra," replied the official, who still seemed to be sure that he could not make any mistakes.

He set to work with as much quickness as he could under the circumstances. In a moment he had given his instructions to the agent and then they climbed into the cab again to proceed to the residence of M. de Taulade. They stopped on the way, however, in front of a guard-house,

and the commissary gave orders that a detachment should be despatched without delay to the house in the Rue Basse-du-Rempart. He seemed to be disposed to take very aggressive measures this time, and Cambremer was overjoyed at the idea of marching at the head of some soldiers who would penetrate into the den with fixed bayonets. "I hope that the minor scoundrel hasn't fled like his master," muttered the eager chevalier.

"Oh! we shall find his servants, at all events," said the commissary; "and I have made up my mind to make a general sweep. When they are once under lock and key, they'll speak out!"

Paul Vernier's heart beat fast when the cab reached the corner of the street which ran along by the Boulevard des Capucines, and he could not help putting his head out of the side window to look for M. de Taulade's house.

"It is strange!" said he, "there are two big vehicles and a number of persons in front of the door."

"The deuce there are! It is high time we arrived!" exclaimed Cassonade.

A moment later the cab stopped short; it could not proceed as the street was completely blocked. Our friends hastily alighted, and the commissary placed himself at the head of the party, taking care to leave his coat open, so as to display the insignia of office which he wore. Barring the road there were about a dozen men, who were engaged in loading two immense furniture vans.

"That is a bad sign!" muttered Cassonade.

"What are you doing there?" asked the commissary of three sturdy fellows who were carrying a superb sofa upholstered with silk damask.

"We are moving the furniture, of course; that's easy to see," said a facetious porter.

"Where is your master?"

"Upstairs, in the owner's room."

There could be no doubt but what M. de Taulade was doing as the leader of the gang had done; he was decamping. However, he might still be in the house; and, at all events, some valuable information might be obtained, so the commissary now made his way through the crowd, bent upon entering the house.

The three friends followed him without saying a single word, so thoroughly were they overwhelmed by their disappointment.

The entrance was wide open, and the main court full of all sorts of furniture. On passing before the doorkeeper's lodge, Paul saw that it was empty. The tall lackey who had so brutally thrust him from the door had vanished, as well as the showy footmen who had stood in the hall on the night before.

They went rapidly up the steps, where some workmen were taking boxes of plants away, and they came to a small parlour, the one where the fascinating baron had so cordially received the son of his friend Vernier. They there now found a pleasant-looking man, who was standing amid a group of workmen and superintending the removal of the curtains and hangings. The commissary called out to them sharply, and as soon as he had made himself known, the work was suspended. Their master then took off his cap respectfully and gave his name, which was that of an upholsterer very well known at the time, and having a good standing in Paris. It was not to be supposed that a tradesman in his position had any

connection with the gang, and the commissary wisely opined that gentle measures would be the best.

"Be good enough to send your workmen away for a moment," said he, in a low tone; "I have something to say to you."

The furniture-dealer at once complied with this injunction, and then waited to be questioned with that anxiety which the best men in the world feel at the prospect of being interrogated by the police. "You know the master of this house, do you not?" asked the commissary.

"Very well, sir; that is to say, that it is I who furnished this house for a lady."

"For a lady!" exclaimed Paul and Cambremer at the same moment.

"Yes; a foreign lady, very rich, I believe."

"How is it, then," said the magistrate, "that a certain Baron de Taulade gave an entertainment here no later than last night?"

"The Baron de Taulade! There must be some mistake," said the upholsterer, in astonishment. "I never heard such a name before, and the person to whom I sold the furniture was called Madame de Sucinio."

The chevalier was about to launch forth some vehement protest, but the commissary made him a sign to keep quiet, and went on methodically: "When did you do so?" he asked, looking fixedly at the tradesman.

"Last year, sir; toward the end of the summer. I can give the exact date from my books."

"Had you ever seen your customer previously?"

"Never. She came to my place with a middle-aged gentleman of respectable appearance, who is, I believe, either her uncle or her guardian. She said that she had just come to Paris, and that she wished to remain there for a time. She paid me cash down on conditions that if she had to leave before the year was up, I would take back the furniture at a difference of ten thousand francs."

"Did she call on you to-day to ask you to carry out that arrangement?"

"Yes; this morning, at ten o'clock, and as she was to leave Paris to-night—so she said—she wished to conclude everything at once. The transaction was a very good one for me, and I was eager to settle the matter. She brought me here with her to make out the inventory; I paid her, and to be on the safe side I brought some workmen here with me to remove the furniture. You see one has to be careful with strangers."

"Did the woman go away as soon as she had received the money?"

"Yes, without losing ten minutes. Her carriage was waiting at the door, and all her servants had been dismissed beforehand; for I found no one here, and we came in by the little door of which she had the key in her pocket."

"Do you know whom the house belongs to?"

"To an Englishman, I believe. Oh, I took my precautions! I saw the receipt for the first rent, and I knew of the arrangements about the notice that she was to give on leaving. The rent was not due till April."

"Didn't you ever come here again after you sold the furniture?"

"Never. Two or three times there were some repairs to be made, and then I always sent my foreman."

"What did he remark?"

"Nothing out of the way, sir. The house seemed to have a great many servants in it. There were dinners and receptions going on; but I believe that the lady herself was often away."

"Had you any idea of her social position? A woman alone does not come to live in Paris unless she has friends or relatives here."

"Well, really, sir," said the upholsterer, "I'm a tradesman, and in doing cash business we don't worry about the standing of our customers. Still, as you ask me what I thought about the lady, I will tell you that I fancied that the old gentleman who accompanied her might be her—protector. He went over the price of everything like a man who knew what he was talking about, and who had to pay for it all."

"What kind of a man was he?"

"He looked very gentlemanly, and must have been a very handsome man when he was young, I should say; he was tall and muscular, with broad shoulders and very white teeth; and he spoke as though he had the habit of giving orders. I thought he seemed like a navy-officer, or a Creole from the colonies."

"What was the woman like?"

"Oh, she was young and very pretty, with a white complexion and black hair and eyes—you don't often see such eyes as her's in Paris. She also had something very decided in her manner, and for my own part I shouldn't think that she had a very good temper."

Cambremer and Paul Vernier glanced at each other, and Cassonade exclaimed: "It is she! It is the adventuress with the red camellia, and her 'protector' is that rascal of a Bousenna!"

"I am quite sure of that," said the commissary, quietly, "but the thing is to find them. You must all come with me to the Prefecture of Police, and in an hour's time the detectives will all be on the search."

V.

THE "WAIT" BEFORE THE FIFTH ACT.

POLICE-OFFICIALS are not infallible, and the commissioner from the Ile Saint Louis had been over-hasty in declaring that M. Bousenna and his gang would soon be caught. Five long days passed by, and the search had no good result, although the most skilful detectives were sent out and made every effort to trace the spurious banker.

The accumulated transgressions of the band had ended by rousing the attention of the higher authorities; the chief of the secret police took up the matter in the hope of distinguishing himself, and put all his men afoot. It is needless to say that they began by ransacking the house on the Boulevard Bonne Nouvelle and the one in the Rue Basse du Rempart, but without discovering anything. The "mouse-traps" which were skilfully organised, did not catch a single mouse. The door-keeper at M. Bousenna's office, the lodgers in Mother Hippolyte's rooms, and the neighbours near Taulade's house, were closely questioned, but they did not furnish any information whatever. As for the deserted houses near the Barrière d'Enfer and on the Rue de Vaugirard, the police had continued to watch them, but no suspicious person had been seen there.

It seemed as though the rascals had all vanished as soon as the police got astir, just like phantoms flitting at dawn of day. And yet the existence of a formidable association of malefactors had been absolutely proved.

The evidence had even thrown some light upon the enigmatical personage whom they all obeyed. It was found that M. Bousenna's pretended bank

was merely used for centralising the funds of the gang; that the men employed there were all affiliated with it, and that poor Paul, who had unknowingly fallen into this den of robbers, had been assisting his master in his nefarious deeds when he had thought that he was merely copying harmless business letters and verifying innocent accounts.

It was also proved that the creature who called herself Madame de Sucinio, and who had such a fancy for fine furniture, was Bousenna's worthy associate.

The stylish house in the Rue Basse du Rempart was a kind of branch establishment, and sometimes served for the orgies of the band, and sometimes as a convenient spot for machinations similar to the one to which Cambremer's young friend had fallen victim. No one remained there long; but on certain days, or rather nights, it was full of guests and servants, like the phantom palaces in which Satan summoned his demons to appear in the plays that came into fashion after 1830.

All this was proved beyond a doubt; but the police, when they had acquired this certainty, were not much better off than before. They had not laid hands on any of the band, and this was all the more astonishing as Bousenna-Biroulas had been assisted in his various schemes by a great number of persons.

It was simply wonderful that all these false clerks, false gentlemen, and false servants could suddenly have disappeared without leaving any trace behind them. It must, however, be admitted that all these persons had been mere supernumeraries in the tragical drama played by the sham banker, and that they had no personal importance whatever.

The fellow named Pavard, in whom the dying man at the hospital had shown so much interest, was the only one of whom the police had any description. Cassonade had seen him sufficiently well to be sure that he would recognise him again if he saw him; but there was little likelihood that the scamp would amuse himself by promenading about Paris, even if he were still there.

The magistrate, who had the affair in hand, was inclined to think that Baluchon had spoken the truth when dying, in saying that the principal haunt of the gang was in the provinces. Excepting the second floor on the Boulevard Bonne Nouvelle, which Bousenna had hired from a very worthy landlord, all the suspicious places belonged to a foreigner who had an English name, and who was represented in Paris by an agent who, on his side, had disappeared immediately after the affair of the vault. The lodging-house in the Rue Sainte Barbe, the place in the Rue Basse, and the two houses in the Quartier de l'Observatoire, came under the same name in the tax list, and this was proof enough.

If the information given by the dead man was to be believed, one might suppose that Bousenna had left the city, where he no longer felt secure, and had repaired to the seashore to carry on his smuggling operations. Such was, indeed, the commissary's belief, although there had been no reports of any suspicious traveller either by post or coach. However the official thought that the banker and his female accomplice had possibly passed the Barrière in a hack and taken a post-chaise at Versailles or elsewhere on the very day of their disappearance. The minor rascals had, no doubt, scattered, leaving Paris in view of meeting in some provincial town where their leader had told them to await him. Cambremer, however, did not agree with the police on this point. He would have been puzzled to say why, but a secret instinct warned him that little Baïa's foe would

costumes, walked about, and laughed with one another for amusement's sake, and not, as is the case at present, to earn the money paid them by some tradesman for doing so. Thus, instead of the mournful-looking fellows who walk up and down upon the asphalt nowadays, rich young fashionables of good position dressed themselves in tinsel, and strutted in the open air talking fish-market slang.

That celebrated nobleman, Lord Seymour, who lived and died in France, was the leader of this noisy festival. He had not his equal for driving a four-in-hand, full of "jolly dogs" and baskets of champagne, or for cracking jokes with the fish-wives and hucksters in true Rabelaisian fashion. He became so well known at this that the pedestrians imagined that they saw Lord Seymour in every elegant carriage that passed by full of merry maskers.

As soon as the sun set, all the crazy crowd left the boulevards for the restaurants or taverns, according as they were rich or poor. They drank champagne or Argenteuil wine, according to their pecuniary means, and in any case dined hastily, for the public balls opened at a very early hour in those days. There were hundreds of them—from the Opera, where the domino still appeared as the exclusive apparel, to the Salon de Mars, where more free-and-easy costumes prevailed.

The most frequented balls, however, were undoubtedly those which delighted the Faubourg du Temple. From Belleville to the Canal Saint Martin, those who danced had only to choose the establishment they preferred, and the noisy festivities went on till daybreak and even later; for, in that quarter, the morning of Ash-Wednesday was entirely given up to the famous "Descente de la Courtille."

This promenade, then so greatly talked of, and already long established, was, in fact, merely the return of the belated maskers who had attended the public-house balls and who were bound to their houses, some in open carriages, some afoot, but all more or less intoxicated. The hoarsest cries, the raciest expressions, and the most outrageous projectiles were reserved for this final episode of the Carnival, not unlike the old return by road from the Epsom Derby—so that those who took part in it went home voiceless, muddy, and sometimes bruised; however this did not prevent them from believing that they had been enjoying themselves beyond measure. The unsightly procession was gazed at by shoals of peaceable citizens and foreigners, who went to view it as people now go to the races.

Of all the establishments where the popular classes amused themselves in this privileged quarter of Paris, the ball of the Vendanges de Bourgogne was certainly the most frequented one. It was situated on the banks of the St. Martin Canal, in a large house belonging to a wine-merchant, who also kept an establishment where wedding repasts were provided. The dining-hall, with accommodation at table for two hundred guests, was transformed into a ball-room for the gaieties of the Carnival, and the echoes that had repeated so many nuptial songs, resounded with the blare of an outrageously noisy brass band. However, the pleasures of the table were not forgotten in this free-and-easy place, for on the two upper floors there were galleries and private rooms where customers could eat and drink at their ease, and those who were in the habit of patronizing the place made frequent use of them.

The public there formed a motley crowd. The main element was composed of the lower classes; however, clerks looking out for adventures, shopkeepers, whom their business did not keep from carousing, and some-

times even the stylish scions of noble families on the search for eccentric amusements, might be met there.

On that particular Shrove-Tuesday, on which, if M. Gévaudan were to be believed, the criminal prosperity of Bousenna was to be put an end to, the Vendanges de Bourgogne was crowded with festive people.

The place was brilliantly illuminated from top to bottom, and a frightful noise prevailed all over it.

The delirious music of a mad gallop which was being danced on the ground floor sounded like an accompaniment to the drinking songs of a hundred discordant voices on the first storey. The lights, the noise, and the dancing made up a scene of such violent excitement as is nowadays never to be found at any ball; and no one would have imagined that a dark drama could be acted amid such a saturnalia.

All the same, however, Cambremer was giving his final instructions to four police-agents in the court-yard—men sent from the Prefecture for this night expedition.

It was not without considerable hesitation that Chevalier Casse-Cou had made up his mind to follow the programme laid out by M. Gévaudan. The letter which that obliging individual had sent him had at first seemed suspicious, for he had begun to mistrust the information from the Rue de la Lune. He had been almost killed in a vault through having scrupulously followed the instructions of his mysterious adviser, and he now began to wonder whether this last advice was not a lure.

Cassonade, having been surety, as it were, for the private detective, was sent for by his master to confer as to what should be done under these peculiar circumstances. The squire, after mature deliberation, advised following Gévaudan's advice once more. He remarked to Cambremer that the letter was very clear and precise, that the suggestion of applying for the assistance of the police shut out all idea of treachery, and that there would be no danger in going to the ball with a good escort. The worst that could happen would be missing Bousenna and his companion; but the traps and ambushes of the past were not to be feared at a public ball, and, besides, the immediate assistance of the police might be relied upon.

Cambremer was by nature strongly inclined in favour of bold operations, and so he was easily persuaded to try the new plan. It was then agreed with the utmost secrecy between Chevalier Casse-Cou and his inseparable squire that they would disguise themselves to spend the night at the Vendanges de Bourgogne ball, after applying for a police escort.

There was but little difficulty in obtaining one from the commissary at the Ile Saint Louis; but the official, who was naturally incredulous, announced his intention of sending on the following day to find out who M. Gévaudan could be. "It may be," he said to Cambremer, "that this man is one of us, and is working on his own account; this is strictly forbidden, but it is done in spite of our watchfulness, and sometimes it is of use. Try the plan to-night, at all events, and I will find out all about this agent in the meantime."

Everything being thus arranged, they met at Morillon's house. The police-agents were to be there at nightfall, for the chevalier did not wish to take his neighbours in the Rue Férou into his confidence, for fear of alarming them. Disguises had been thought advisable for one and all, and Cassonade had undertaken to hire costumes and bring them to the cab-driver's residence.

The intelligent squire picked out a harlequin's dress for his master, and for himself a pair of velvet breeches, a jacket of the same material, a broad belt, and a high hat, such as then made up the attire of what was called a "wharf-rat." The four police-agents had been uniformly clad in the white garments of a clown, but each had taken care to place a knot of black ribbon on his left shoulder, so as to be recognised by his own party. It is needless to add that all were closely masked, which at that time was nothing out of the way, even as regards men.

These preparations took up some time, and they could not start until eleven o'clock in the evening.

Before going off, Cambremer, with commendable foresight, requested Morillon to call at the Rue Férou on the following morning without fail. He had a sufficient body-guard with him to fear nothing; but it seemed best to him to leave a friend behind to act at once in case his return to the house should be delayed.

They took one of the huge coaches which were then in use to go to the ball. Cassonade hired this antediluvian vehicle for the entire night, and he did so with a double motive. If it became necessary to continue the pursuit until the "*Descente de la Courtille*" took place, the carriage would be in readiness; and if, on the contrary, they had a chance of arresting Bousenna before the ball was over, they wished to be able to take him to prison at once. During the ride they discussed their plan of action, for the operation presented some difficulties. To seize upon a man and woman in the midst of a crowd of loose people, was not by any means an easy thing. The police agents knew by experience that they never had easy work at the balls near the *Barrière*, and they thought that it would be advisable to act with great caution.

It was therefore decided that Cambremer and Cassonade should undertake to find Bousenna and his amiable companion, and follow them until the loving pair took it into their heads to repair to supper or merely to enter the refreshment-room; and this, judging from all that was known of them, could hardly fail to happen before the night was over. The police-agents, disguised as clowns, intended to mingle with the crowd, without, however, losing sight of their leaders; and, as soon as they saw the punchinello and the fishwife appear, they were to surround them and carry them off with as much quickness and dexterity as possible. They were told to summon the watch, if need were.

Having made these sagacious arrangements as he left the hack, Cambremer went on ahead of the police-agents, and entered the ball-room with Cassonade. Although he had been fond of such gay affairs when a student, the chevalier had not gone to a ball for some years. The Carnival balls had thus become unfamiliar to him, and he had the same feeling on entering the "*Vendanges de Bourgogne*" as the Doge of Genoa experienced at Versailles. The thing that surprised him most was to find himself there.

There was noise enough to confuse anybody. In an immense hall, lit by hundreds of oil-lamps, a motley throng was spinning round, to the loud blare of a brass band, which wildly excited the motley throng of maskers. The hoarse cries of the male dancers, and the sharp laughter of the women, mingled with the sounds from the brazen trumpets; and a continuous tramp tramp shook the floor like an earthquake.

For the first few moments Cambremer could only distinguish a confused and moving mass; for thick steam went up to the ceiling, like a kind of human mist. However, he slipped in among the dancers, and

after a few moments began to regain his self-possession. All the same, his costume annoyed him. Although one may be tall, slim, and agile, it is not easy to play the harlequin, if one is unaccustomed to wearing the disguise. The chevalier handled the customary wooden wand very clumsily, and would greatly have preferred a real sword. However, after some little time he succeeded in gaining more ease and freedom, and finally made his way through the crowd by leaping and skipping about like a true Italian *arlecchino*.

Cassonade made way for him by elbowing and pushing the people about, and as all this belonged to the part of a "wharf-rat," no one complained. The squire had adapted himself to his costume with much more ease than his master. His short figure and broad shoulders were well suited to the easy jacket which he had donned, and he had cocked his hat very aggressively on one side; in a word, assuming all the swagger of the men who habitually hang about the quays of Paris.

Before plunging in among the groups around the dancers, Cambremer looked back, and had the satisfaction of seeing the four clowns slip in one after another, and mingle with the maskers. Reassured as to the position of his reserved force, he pushed vigorously on, and tried to get nearer the quadrille dancers. He hoped that he might catch Bousenna in the very act of dancing, and have a good opportunity to look at him without being noticed himself.

Several quadrilles were being danced, but the intelligent Cassonade directed himself towards the set which drew the most spectators to watch it. From M. Gévaudan's statements as to the sham banker's habits, it might be supposed that the old rascal would naturally excel in the outrageous kind of dancing which was preferred by the people, and no doubt he was sufficiently expert to shine among the celebrated terpsichorean artistes of the "Vendanges de Bourgogne."

In the middle of the hall there was at this moment a group whose startling performances were calling forth the enthusiastic applause of all the lookers-on. This set indeed attracted so many spectators that it was hard to get near the privileged circle. The two friends succeeded, however, in slipping in among the people who were looking at the saltatory party. Cassonade, by stooping down, got into the first row, while Cambremer's tall figure enabled him to look over the heads of the people who immediately encircled the dancers.

The sight which he beheld was well worthy of being studied by an observer of low life in Paris. Four couples, facing each other, were at that moment executing the most extraordinary leaps. At public balls in those days, there was no such thing as the "stormy tulip" and other loose-jointed performances, such as made Mabilie so popular later on. The eccentric dance to which Rigolboche owed her European celebrity, and which was called the "cancan," was then in its infancy.

In 1831, the dancing at the public-house balls was a mixture of graceful capering and delirious stamping. A remembrance of the elegant bearing of the dancers who had shone under the Restoration still influenced masqueraders, but a revolutionary element might now be found in the dances, and, indeed, the quadrille at which Cambremer was looking recalled Vestris and the convulsionists of the cemetery of Saint Médard at one and the same time.

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It was being executed by a couple of jack-puddings and two demons, with two "Follies" and two shepherdesses as their partners. There was

no punchinello or fish-wife to be seen, and, consequently, Bousenna and his party could not be there. Cambremer did not leave the spot, however, for one of the couples had attracted his attention. It was that which faced him, and it comprised a very muscular demon and a tall and slender Folly. Both were closely masked and somewhat better attired than those around them.

At important moments one is always more excitable than at other times, and Cambremer imagined that they were looking at him. So he began, in his turn, to look at them, and fancied that there was some similitude between the powerful frame of the demon and that of M. Bousenna; however, this fancy did not rest upon any serious ground, and he dismissed it forthwith.

At this moment a loud shout announced the arrival of a fresh couple, and this time chance served Cambremer well; for the crowd opened to allow a punchinello to come up with a fish-wife upon his shoulders. The man set down his feminine burden in the very midst of the quadrille, and this new way of securing a place in a dance was hailed with unanimous applause.

"The red flower!" muttered Chevalier Casse-Cou, seeing that the two maskers wore the token of recognition mentioned by M. Gévaudan.

Cassonade, who also saw it, nudged his master, and from that moment the new-comers engrossed the entire attention of Baïa's avengers.

The punchinello wore a costume of great richness, with a great deal of showy trimming, gold braid on every seam, and a pair of well-made wooden shoes. As for the fish-wife, she was arrayed in silk stockings, high-heeled shoes, and had a superb gold cross hanging from her neck. All these dainty details were so many indications of the true social position of these maskers. However, their bearing had nothing refined about it. The man began by a startling leap, and the woman by half-a-dozen capers, executed with remarkable skill, and then they indulged in a Corybantic dance.

They did not pay the slightest attention to the figures, but their feats were so much admired that the other dancers did not complain of being disturbed in their evolutions. Moreover, the punchinello appeared to be intoxicated. When he leaped up into the air, and assumed a grotesque attitude, or stretched out his legs as far as possible, he managed to preserve his equilibrium; but as soon as he stood still, he was seen to stagger every instant. His companion stood better, but she also seemed to have taken a little too much wine, for her pirouetting was somewhat unsteady.

Nothing could be better suited for Cambremer's purpose. It would be easy to capture a man who was under the influence of drink. So he turned stealthily to see if the police agents were near at hand, and observed with great satisfaction that they had slipped in among the dancers and were near the suspicious group. They had evidently recognised the red flowers, and were going to keep them in sight.

The chevalier now pulled Cassonade by the sleeve, to warn him to keep his eyes open, and at that very moment the dancing suddenly stopped. The orchestra had just finished playing the last bars, and by way of finishing the quadrille, the punchinello indulged in some sharp howls, which were repeated as a chorus by the whole band.

The breaking-up of the quadrille caused a great stir in the crowd, and Chevalier Casse-Cou was afraid for a moment that he might be separated from his faithful squire. However, he managed to catch hold of his arm,

and both of them, pushing and being pushed against, succeeded in keeping near the enemy.

The gaily-dressed couple, with their flowers still visible, crossed the hall, accompanied by various jack-puddings and shepherdesses, near whom they had danced. Meanwhile, Cambremer and Cassonade followed as well as they were able, and the four clowns were at their heels.

The chevalier felt annoyed that his enemies should be so well masked. They did not wear the small affairs reaching only to the mouth such as are now-a-days in vogue. From the forehead to the chin their countenances were entirely hidden from sight. Since he could not see, Cambremer wished to hear, if possible, but the man had that curious instrument called a "Punch's whistle" in his mouth, and it only emitted dull, inarticulate sounds. As for the fish-wife, she did not say anything whatever; and besides that, the other people made such a noise that any single voice would have been inaudible.

The whole party went, pell-mell, to the further end of the hall. This here communicated with the restaurant, and the chevalier's heart beat fast at the thought that the couple were about to go and drink, and that the police agents would seize upon them. The detectives were no doubt on the alert, for they went stealthily towards the exit.

There came a block in the crowd of maskers, followed by an exchange of coarse sallies and broad jokes. Then the couple who were being watched made up their minds to leave their friends. The punchinello seized the fish-wife round the waist, gave a sharp whistle, executed a characteristic step, and kicked the folding-door open with his wooden shoe.

"We wish you a good appetite, little woman!" called out one of the jack-puddings standing by.

"At last!" muttered the chevalier, seizing Cassonade by the arm and pressing it tightly.

The door closed upon the pair, and Cambremer went forward rapidly, so as not to lose a second. In order to go the faster, he had let go of Cassonade's arm, and he was almost at the door when a loud bang on the big drum resounded like a bomb exploding in the midst of the crowd. A loud shout replied to this signal, and the crowd began to spin round, as though everybody had been seized with vertigo.

Casse-Cou and the squire found themselves caught in a compact throng before they could go a single step further. Vainly did they struggle; there were so many living obstacles between them and the exit, that they could not stir. The only consolation they had was in seeing the four clowns dexterously elbow their way through, and glide from the hall after the punchinello. Their dexterity as police agents had enabled them to accomplish more than the friends from the Rue Férou, and they had managed to keep out of the thick of the crowd.

"The detectives won't lose sight of them at all events," said Cambremer to his faithful companion, who was vainly struggling to get away.

The drum which had produced so great an effect upon the crazy crowd announced one of the greatest pleasures of the ball. Having forgotten all about such things, the chevalier did not remember any other dance but the quadrille, so he was wondering what was going to happen, when he heard shouts of: "The gallop! the gallop!"

He then understood the meaning of the tumult, and had he been better acquainted with the usages of the place, he would have previously heard of the new dance which was then so popular. The species of steeple-chase

called the gallop was an English importation, and then enjoyed all the popularity afterwards obtained by the polka, which came in ten years later. There was a perfect frenzy about it at the time, and this had begun at the most fashionable balls, finally reaching the lowest dancing establishments. Fellows "galloped" at the Barrière as much as in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, but they did not gallop in the same way. In the world of fashion people limited themselves to a measured movement which had no drawback, except that of making the couples who were agile enough to dance it, rather breathless for the time being, but at the Vendanges de Bourgogne it was quite another thing.

The drum had set everyone astir, and in the twinkling of an eye the people who were fond of this dance formed a long double file. Cambremer and Cassonade were caught among the links of this moving chain, and, in spite of themselves, were borne onward.

Chance so willed it that their nearest neighbours should be some of the dancers in the famous quadrille in which the punchinello and the fish-wife had won well-merited applause. The chevalier had a demon on one side of him, and a "folly" on the other, the same who had at first attracted his attention; while a jack-pudding and a shepherdess were close to his squire.

Both were wondering how they could have been caught in this way, when, suddenly, a perfect storm burst forth in the orchestra above their heads. From the platform where they overlooked the hall, ten trombones and as many cornets blared forth brazen notes, while ophicleides bellowed like bulls, and cymbals made a terrible jingling. It was a diabolical compound of all the known and unknown brass instruments available. Then the couples darted onward to a hurried strain that sounded like a cavalry charge.

Cambremer felt as though a whirlwind had taken him up, and as if a wave had beaten against him at the same moment. In less than a second, he felt two arms pulling him along, and he lost sight of Cassonade. It would have been as impossible to resist this human avalanche as to swim against the rush of a mill-dam.

The heroic chevalier made a few attempts to escape by slipping on one side, but he was held as in a vice, and had to move on with the others perforce. The torrent rolled on round the hall, revolving in this way around a central throng, formed of less alert spectators, who made up for their immobility by uttering wild howls.

The mass had begun by bounding along in something like time, but the mad round presently became a furious race. The couples no longer galloped, they plunged; and, at times, a whole row of fellows leapt upon the shoulders of those ahead just as oxen do when they are being driven to market. A spectator in an upper gallery would certainly have taken the throng for a troop of bewitched people returning from a witches' sabbath.

The strains of the orchestra became wilder and louder; the piercing blast seeming to be some hymn in glory of the "Demon of All Ill." At intervals, shrill cries were heard above the racket, and then the whirlwind ceased for a moment.

A couple would fall, and those behind would stumble upon their prostrate forms; however, the wave would sweep on, and people trod upon the fallen dancers with as much indifference as a troop of cavalry passes over the comrades who have fallen beneath the enemy's fire. Cambremer's anger was beyond description. To be forced to dance a gallop with a set

of maniacs, while the fate of the base Bousenna was being settled in the next room, was torture that the poor chevalier had not expected. He cursed the fatal delay which had exposed him to this ridiculous mishap, and was so infuriated that he would certainly have used his fists upon his nearest neighbours and kicked them, had he been able to stir hand or foot.

But a sword in its sheath could not be more powerless than the long, lanky frame of Baïa's protector. He would have been smothered, had he been shorter, and he thought, from time to time, that Cassonade, who was by no means as tall as himself, must be in a pretty plight. At the third turn, Cambremer thought of a no less disagreeable possibility. The rush was not so great; the ranks were no longer as close, and it was clear that if the music suddenly stopped, a general tumble would be the result of the sudden interruption.

The chevalier made ready to meet the shock. He stiffened his arms so as to be able to thrust them forward when the breaking away began, and in this somewhat awkward attitude, he held his wooden wand against his chest. It was lucky that he took this precaution, for the music of the orchestra suddenly ceased, and the natural effect of the cessation of sound was that the column scattered. There was an open space in front of Cambremer, and thus deprived of the support of those upon whom he had leaned, he was violently dashed against the wall.

The confusion which followed was frightful. A perfect cascade of human bodies fell for some seconds upon several unlucky individuals whom the shock had upset. They looked like pasteboard figures, blown over by a high wind.

The chevalier, stunned by the shock, lay upon the floor, and felt a living mountain accumulate upon him; however, this situation, as trying as it was ridiculous, did not elicit a sound from him. He was drawing himself together and arching his back as well as he could so as to bear the crushing weight, when he felt a hand slip under his right arm, and then a violent shock, followed by a sharp pain.

He could not very well tell what had happened, but he thought he had been stabbed. As this blow might be followed up by another one, he took good care not to stir. His presence of mind saved him. The persons who had fallen rose up one after another, and finally he recovered his liberty of motion, and stood up in his turn.

His first thought was to pass his hand across his chest, and he found a slit in his harlequin costume. The hand which he raised to the rent became reddened with a few drops of blood, which he hastily wiped away.

It was evident that an attempt had been made to kill him, but his wand had served him as a shield, and the weapon had but grazed the skin. The attempted murder was undoubted, but its author was still to be discovered.

Cambremer looked round him on all sides, and in the crowd he could not find any one he knew, excepting Cassonade, who was breathless and tottering. The poor squire had been borne along like his master by the torrent, and had finally been cast into the middle of the hall.

"I have been wounded," said the chevalier.

"Good heavens! yes, you are bleeding!"

"Be quiet; we have no time to say anything now. We must catch those men."

Then, slipping his handkerchief under his harlequin costume, Cambremer

began to push on towards the door, by which the punchinello and the fish-wife had gone off. He had not walked far, however, before he was taken gently by the arm. He turned round, and found that the Folly who had been in the quadrille had joined him.

This unexpected conquest was not at all to his taste, and he disengaged himself more abruptly than was polite; however, the girl clutched him all the tighter, saying: "I must speak with you, my handsome harlequin."

Cassonade had not seen this meeting, and he continued to walk on, so that his master, in his eagerness to catch up with him, repulsed the intruder with his elbow. "If you knew what I have to tell you," continued the woman, "you would not be in such a hurry."

"What can you have to tell me?" asked Cambremer, annoyed by her insistence.

"Things that interest you much more than what is going on here," replied the woman."

"I have no time to guess enigmas. Explain yourself a little more clearly."

While the woman was speaking, the chevalier called out to Cassonade, to prevent him from leaving the hall without him. "What is the matter?" asked the squire, in a low tone.

"I wish to speak to you about Monsieur Bousenna," now whispered the unknown woman in Cambremer's ear.

He started on hearing this, and looked the woman full in the face. "Who is Monsieur Bousenna, and how are you aware that I know him?" he asked, curtly.

"I saw you once, and I have never forgotten your face."

"My face?" repeated the chevalier, who thought that it was carefully hidden beneath the black gauze mask belonging to his harlequin disguise.

"Yes; do you imagine that it is invisible to-night? Look in that glass over there."

Cambremer gave a quick look at a square mirror hanging behind a counter on which a dealer had spread out some oranges, and he saw, with regret, that his mask had been completely unsettled by his fall. His first movement was to push it down, and when he thought himself sufficiently well masked, he replied to the woman in a sharp tone: "What you say may be true; but where did you ever see me before?"

"In the Rue Sainte Barbe, on the third floor of Madame Hippolyte's lodging-house."

This seemed serious, indeed, and Chevalier Casse-Cou was greatly puzzled what to do. On the one hand, he wished to hear what the woman had to say, and on the other, he was anxious to know whether the detectives had succeeded in laying hands upon the punchinello and the fish-wife.

After a moment's reflection he made up his mind to take Cassonade aside. "Go and see what the police have done, and come back and tell me," said he.

"Oh, I won't stay long away," replied the squire; "but mind you are careful."

"Oh! what could happen to me here among so many people?"

"We can't tell. You know that, during that infernal gallop, as it may well be called, they tried to stab you."

"Bah! I must have hurt myself in falling, but no matter; I promise you that they sha'n't do so again. Run off and see what our men are at; I won't go away, and you will find me near this door."

"Good! I will merely go and return; but if they need you, be ready!"

With these last words, Cassonade pushed open the folding-doors and disappeared.

"Now," said Cambremer, returning to the woman upon whom he had chanced to light, "I am listening: but, if you wish me to believe you, you must begin by telling me your name, and showing me your face."

"You will probably fail to recognise either; but there is one circumstance that you have certainly not forgotten."

"What is that?"

"Your visit with the commissary to the room from which that box of flowers fell, killing the poor man who was dressed as a Turk."

"I remember that, most assuredly," stammered Chevalier Casse-Cou, in an agitated tone, "but what has that to do with—"

"What has a garret in a lodging-house to do with a dancer at the Vendanges de Bourgogne? Well, I will tell you. The garret was occupied that day by a fringe-maker, whose name was mentioned before you."

"Amanda?" said Cambremer, whose memory was excellent.

"Exactly; and the poor girl was questioned in your presence, and even severely censured for having left the key in her door."

"True, and but for that piece of negligence, the creature who killed Kaddour could not have got into the room."

"Well, I am Amanda."

"You!" exclaimed the chevalier, in surprise.

"Yes. Do you now understand why I wish to talk to you?"

Cambremer's amazement can scarcely be described. He so little expected to meet any such person as this that he was completely at a loss what to do or say. The dancer who had so unexpectedly told him her name seemed to be speaking in perfect good faith, and yet he had a feeling that some trap was being laid for him.

"Ah! I have looked everywhere for you," said Mademoiselle Amanda, "and if I had known where you lived, I should have gone to tell you what I will tell you to-night; but I did not even know your name, and I don't know it now, and, besides, I was watched."

While she was speaking, Cambremer looked attentively at her and endeavoured to ascertain whether the figure and face hidden under the costume and the mask which she wore really corresponded with those of the fringe-maker whom he had seen merely for a few moments. The woman seemed to him taller and younger, but then disguises are apt to mislead one. As for the girl's voice, the chevalier could not remember what it had sounded like when he had previously heard it.

"Watched! Are you in that man's power?" said he, gently.

"Silence!" whispered the girl; "he is here!"

"Are you sure of that?"

"He was here just now; He went away to have a drink, and may return at any moment; besides, his spies are all about the place."

This time she was certainly telling the truth, and this proof of sincerity induced Cambremer to make up his mind to listen to her. "Well," said he, "I am ready to listen to you, and somewhere else than in this ball-room; but you must first of all assure me of one thing."

At this moment Cassonade came to the door. His delighted countenance showed that he was the bearer of good news, in fact, he walked quickly up to his master as if to speak, but before he could do so, the chevalier stepped forward, exclaiming: "I have a word to say to my friend."

"All is going on well," whispered Cassonade in response.

"What! Is he arrested?"

"I hope so. This is what happened in the refreshment-room: The punchinello was swallowing some rum at the counter and the fish-wife was eating some plums. Then one of our men went up as though he had been drinking too much, and knocked over the woman's glass. Her 'gentleman' gave our fellow a blow with his fist. The others took it up, and there was a general quarrel. They hustled one another about, and finally knocked one another down."

"Tell me the result, for Heaven's sake, and quickly."

"Well, at last the watch came in and arrested everybody."

"What do you mean by everybody?"

"I mean the punchinello and his 'lady,' and our four clowns, besides."

"And now—"

"Now they must be at the police-station. I'll warrant you that they won't get out."

"We must see about that."

"Why, sir, our men will tell the police who they are, and the commissary will know them. They must have their cards in their pockets, and it won't take much time to explain to the officer all about Bousenna."

"You are right; and I am beginning to believe that we have him this time. But I don't wish to neglect any precaution. The police-agents must not commit any folly in our absence."

"Oh, the station-house is only two steps off, and there is nothing to prevent us from going there. That is why I came for you."

Cambremer longed to follow his squire and make sure that the vile rascal whom he had so long pursued would not escape him. However, he believed that the testimony of the girl beside him would be of great importance in proving Bousenna's guilt at a later day.

"Listen," said he to Cassonade; "I have just met a woman who offers to tell me some of that scoundrel's secrets. I must listen to her, but it won't take up more than fifteen minutes at the most. You must go to our men at the station-house and tell them what is keeping me, and tell them, also, that I shall come to them. I must be present at the interrogatory."

"The deuce! that may not suit them, and if they have contrary orders at head-quarters, they won't like to wait."

"I repeat that I sha'n't stay long. Go! and be sure that they keep a close watch on Bousenna and his accomplice."

Cambremer spoke so decidedly that Cassonade did not dare to insist.

"I am going, sir; but if I particularly wanted to speak to you at once, where should I find you?"

"In the restaurant. You will see me seated at a table with this woman."

"Good! it is agreed then." And the squire went off without saying anything more.

The conversation had taken place in a corner, and the 'Folly' could not hear it, as she was occupied in keeping off the passing gallants who took her by the waist or chucked her under the chin. There was not a trace to be seen of the dancers who had taken part in the quadrille with her. After the gallop they had all mingled with the crowd, a circumstance which seemed to indicate that all of them—including the demon who had danced with her—were only chance acquaintances.

"I will attend to you now," said Cambremer.

"Let us go out, then," replied Mademoiselle Amanda, quietly.

"But where can we talk without being disturbed?"

"You need merely follow me. But don't seem to know me as long as we are in the crowd; and if any one speaks to me, don't come too close, for fear of exciting suspicion."

This course was pursued in every particular. The girl went out first and Cambremer noiselessly followed her. The door of the hall opened upon a room at the end of which there was a large bar, where a great many persons were being served. There was an incessant coming and going of masqueraders, most of whom were intoxicated, and such a place seemed quite unsuited to confidential talk.

However, the girl went through the room without stopping, and the chevalier, who was walking behind her, caught a scrap of the conversation going on among those who were drinking. The contest which had just taken place, and the arrests which had followed, were being alluded to by these people, and Cambremer was not sorry to hear the great news brought to him by Cassonade thus confirmed.

However, Amanda now began to ascend a staircase which led to the first floor. There was a crowd there also, as well as in the room where the chevalier had intended to remain with his new acquaintance. In fact, there was not a single unoccupied table, and the girl contented herself with glancing through the glass door.

"Where can she be taking me?" thought Cambremer, seeing her proceed towards a long passage where a waiter was bustling about with a napkin over his arm.

"Open a room for us," now said the fringe-maker to the white-aproned attendant.

"A room for two?" asked the waiter.

"Of course; we are not a dozen!" replied the fringe-maker, petulantly.

This new arrangement made a great deal of difference in Cambremer's plans. He had told Cassonade that he would be in the common hall, and by consenting to repair to a private room, he exposed himself to being separated from his squire, whom he did not wish to miss.

However, he said to himself, that, after all, the conference could not last very long, and that it was not worth while, at the moment, to make any objection.

The waiter bowed on receiving the order so curtly given by the girl, and then opened the door of a somewhat shabby room, not much bigger than a band-box. The furniture comprised a table covered with a moderately clean cloth and a sofa upholstered in Utrecht velvet worn by long use. The little nook had a window opening upon the main court of the house, and was entered by the passage in which Chevalier Casse-Cou and his chance acquaintance had met the waiter. "What shall I serve you, sir?" asked the attendant.

Cambremer's mind was scarcely in a state to order supper, and he would have liked to send the attentive waiter to the devil, but Amanda spoke up: "A bowl of kirsch punch and some biscuits," ordered this amiable young person.

"In one moment, madame," replied the waiter, and then turning to Cambremer, he added: "Ten francs, if you please, sir."

The confidence of the landlord of the Vendanges de Bourgogne did not go so far as to give his customers a moment's credit. He believed in the English system "pay and then you shall be served." While Cambremer was fumbling in his pockets, the waiter stepped into the passage to order the

punch to be brought. The bar-room where the fiery compound was made, led to the restaurant, and in less than a minute, the refreshment was served and paid for. The door then closed upon the ill-assorted pair, and they were left with but one candle to light them.

The girl seated herself with an easy air upon the sofa, and with a gesture of coquettish freedom, exclaimed: "Come, sit beside me."

This all too-winning manner somewhat frightened the chevalier, who was by no means disposed to start a commonplace flirtation with a gay and festive work-girl. He had come to listen, and not to make love to her. "That is unnecessary. I shall hear quite as well standing," said he.

"Very well, sir," said Amanda, quietly; "it won't take long."

"I am waiting."

"Well, then, I have asked you to come with me to save you from a great danger."

"What can that be?" coldly replied Cambremer, who thought that M. Bousenna was no longer to be feared.

"The danger of death. Oh, don't protest! Your enemy knows that you are here to-night, and he is quite determined not to let you leave this place alive. I am also exposing myself to danger by telling you this, for I am entirely in his power, and if he finds us together, I shall be lost."

"I think that you exaggerate the danger; but I am greatly obliged to you for your good intention; however, you will understand that I have strong reasons for mistrusting every one. This is why I first wish to know the true motive of your conduct. People don't usually interest themselves in persons they do not know, and you only saw me for a few moments on the day you have alluded to."

"That is true; and I tell you frankly that what I am doing is less through interest in you than through hatred of that man."

"Then tell me why you hate him."

"Because he is my master, and a slave always hates a master."

"Those are mere words, and I must ask you to speak more clearly, if you wish me to believe you."

"Well, then, this is my story. I am a work-girl, and I have always been poor: but I was working day and night, and earning my living honestly, when the owner of the shop for which I worked asked me to go to collect a large bill. I was paid in bank-notes, and I had the misfortune to lose the money in the street. I told the shopkeeper what had happened, but he dismissed me, calling me a thief, and informing me that on the following day he would enter a complaint against me. The thought of going to prison drove me crazy; I went to my room in the Rue Sainte Barbe, and I had just lighted a pan of charcoal hoping to suffocate myself with its fumes, when there was a knock at the door."

"It was he."

"You have guessed correctly, and you will understand what followed. How did Monsieur Bousenna know what had happened to me? I am not able to tell you; but he came to propose a bargain to me, a bargain which I was weak enough to agree to."

"He gave you the money that you had lost?"

"Yes; on condition that I would help him in his schemes, and, in order to be quite sure of my obedience, he made me sign a document in which I admitted that I had stolen this sum."

"That is strange!" muttered Cambremer, who was mentally comparing this story with that of Paul Vernier. There was a great similarity between

the two cases, and it was clear that M. Bousenna was fond of making use of that dishonest form of strategy called blackmail.

"You see, sir, that I am in this man's power, and—"

"I can take you out of it," interrupted the chevalier, quickly.

"I doubt it; and I must tell you that if you do not come to some agreement with him, you will be killed in this unequal struggle."

"What agreement do you mean? what agreement could be made with such a scoundrel?"

"Well, you will see; for I have learned several of his secrets, and I have known all about this affair from the time it began in the box at the Odéon."

"At the Odéon!" exclaimed Cambremer, seating himself upon the sofa which he had at first refused to occupy. It seemed to him that he would be better able to grasp the girl's meaning if he were seated nearer to her.

"Yes," resumed Mademoiselle Amanda, "I was living at Madame Hippolyte's lodging-house when the lady who was at the theatre came there, and I know all that happened on the night when she went there."

"What was her name? what is the child's name? Where did they come from?" asked the chevalier, greatly excited.

"I don't know their names; but they had come from a château which belongs to Monsieur Bousenna, and they came to Paris to settle some money-matters which fell through owing to the death of the lady and the abduction of her child."

"The abduction of the child!" repeated Cambremer; "why, it was he who voluntarily deserted her, after killing her mother."

"I do not believe it," said the girl, shaking her head; "for he is only persecuting you in order to get her back, and I am sure that if you consented to yield her up to him, he would cease worrying you at once."

"Is this a proposal which he sent you to make to me?"

"Perhaps it is."

This reply once more aroused all the chevalier's mistrust, although he had for a time ventured to believe in the good faith of Mademoiselle Amanda. He began to look her full in the face, endeavouring to read her meaning in her eyes, which sparkled like fire. However, the girl bore his scrutiny without the slightest embarrassment. Cambremer was tempted to give her an angry reply, and he was forced to restrain himself. It required, on his part, a great effort to refrain from tearing away the velvet mask which concealed the features of M. Bousenna's ambassador. However, he thought it best to resort to strategy, and to feign to accept the bargain, in order to obtain some more information. The danger of compromising himself no longer existed, as Bousenna must by this time be in the hands of the police.

"I am listening to you," said he, "and if what you have to propose on this man's part is really acceptable, I may perhaps make peace."

"Very well; I will begin then by telling you frankly that I have an interest in persuading you. Monsieur Bousenna has promised me that if I do so, he will hand me back the paper that compromises me."

"You told me just now that hatred alone made you speak out."

"I detest him, that is true; but I am also afraid of him. However, when I have no further cause to fear him, I shall revenge myself upon him."

Cambremer did not waste time in inquiring into Mademoiselle Amanda's contradictory language, and he thought he would have abundant time to reassure her if he wished to do so.

"Let me know what the conditions are," said he.

"There are two : in the first place, give up the little girl, and, if you consent, matters will be arranged in such a way as to remove all your scruples. Monsieur Bousenna will speak with her in your presence—"

"In a language that no one can understand?"

"No matter ; the child will be fully able to express by signs any repugnance or pleasure she may feel at the idea of going away with him, and, in any case, you can break the bargain."

"What else?" said Cambremer, coldly.

"You must break off all connection with Monsieur Paul Vernier, and cease to occupy yourself about him."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, that is absolutely all ; and when that is done, Monsieur Bousenna will leave Paris, never to return ; but I shall remain here, and I will tell you several other things, for I shall no longer be at his mercy."

This last proposal might have tempted Cambremer had he been at all doubtful about the banker's arrest. However, he believed that he had the miscreant in his power, and he thought that the time had come to end the matter.

"Monsieur Bousenna is now no longer to be feared," said he ; "and as for the bargain which you propose to me, I shall ask you to repeat it before the commissary of police."

Instead of feeling alarmed by this formidable suggestion, Mademoiselle Amanda quietly rose up.

"You refuse, then?" said she, in her mildest accents.

"I refuse."

"Farewell, then," she added, running to the door.

Cambremer regretted having yielded to the curiosity which led him to seat himself beside her ; for, before leaving him, the girl touched him on the shoulder, as if to push him from her, and her touch, for a woman, was remarkably hard—so hard, indeed, that it hurt him. If he had been standing, he could easily have barred her way, but on rising up he caught his leg against the foot of the table, and lost time in emerging from his corner. Thus, Mademoiselle Amanda was able to open the door, and dart down the passage unprevented. To cap the climax, as the saying goes, she had, in her hasty flight, upset the candle, so that the room was almost dark. The blue flame from the punch-bowl gave but a faint gleam, and the fugitive had, moreover, pulled the door after her. The consequence was, that the chevalier lost some moments more in looking for the knob, and opening the door.

When he had finally done so, it was too late. He knocked against a waiter carrying some plates and glasses, and, as he had not gone out slowly by any means, the shock was disastrous.

"You clumsy brute !" called out the fellow with the white apron, as he fell among the fragments of his glasses and plates.

However, Cambremer passed pitilessly over his prostrate body, and fell like a bombshell into the restaurant. His appearance was hailed with loud shouts. The noise of the broken glass and the cries of the waiter had been heard, and the over-excited revellers had no idea of neglecting so fine a chance to make a noise. "Hurrah, there, Harlequin ! Are you running after your Columbine?"

"What's become of your wand?"

"Oh, what a head !"

"Stop him ! stop him !" now shouted the waiter, who had succeeded in picking himself up.

Cambremer saw that it would be best to put an end to this scene as soon as possible, for he had found by glancing rapidly round that Mademoiselle Amanda was not in the ball-room, and he was anxious to follow her outside, where she must have gone. So he threw some money to the victim of his impetuosity, and went down the steps at full speed. At the last step, the accident of the passage came near being repeated with an individual who was coming up. However, this time, Chevalier Casse-Cou fell into the arms of Cassonade.

The nimble squire was running so fast in the opposite direction that the shock knocked off the hat belonging to his disguise.

"Let me pass," said Cambremer, hastily ; "that woman has escaped me, and I must find her again at once."

"But what does that matter, sir ? Come to the police station with me ; it is much more urgent to attend to that part of the business."

"I tell you that this girl is an agent of Bousenna, and that her testimony will greatly help us."

"I don't say that it won't ; but before you pick up witnesses, let us attend to the accused. I assure you that matters are not progressing properly down there."

"What ! have they been allowed to go ?"

"No ; but they will be if you don't come at once. We have a fellow to deal with of incredible coolness, and he stoutly denies everything. He asserts that he doesn't know what we mean, and that he doesn't know me. That isn't surprising, as I myself never saw Monsieur Bousenna ; but it embarrasses me, and I don't know what to say to the official who is questioning him."

"That's true," muttered the chevalier ; "you were not there when he had the impudence to come to see me, and I had forgotten that, in case of being confronted with the scoundrel, you couldn't swear to his identity."

"You see, sir, that you will have to come at once."

"You are right ; and Mademoiselle Amanda has had time enough already to get away in the crowd, so that I cannot catch her now."

"Let us be off, then, sir ; the station-house is but two paces away, and I will take you there. When you have shut Bousenna's mouth up, and he is on the way to the Conciergerie, we can come back and take a turn through the ball-room to look for the girl."

"Yes ; that is decidedly the best plan," said Cambremer, making ready to follow his squire.

This short conversation had taken place at a few steps from the dancing-hall, amid arriving and departing revellers, who were continually rushing up and down, while the orchestra continued to belch forth a torrent of so-called harmony.

In front of the principal entrance of the establishment, various vehicles of all sorts and sizes were standing—coaches, cabriolets, and vans—all for the accommodation of the masqueraders, when the time for the famous "Descente de la Courtille" arrived. The two friends—for the ex-grocer was now certainly in the position of a friend to Cambremer—were obliged to pass through a labyrinth of wheels, vehicles, and horses ; and not without coming in for some abuse from the weary drivers.

Cassonade, who had a quick eye, thought that he saw some one driving

away in a carriage, and if he had not been in so great a hurry, he would have stopped to look more closely.

"Did you recognise the woman at the station-house?" now asked the chevalier: "you must have done so."

"Well, I wasn't sure; I only saw the creature for a moment, and that was at the cemetery, and a long time has gone by since then. But she is a tall woman, who answers very well to the description which you gave me of her."

"Ah! the wretches won't dare to continue playing this farce before me."

"I trust not; but we shall soon see, for here we are."

The police station of this noisy neighbourhood was a small building near the canal. There was some little stir before the door, for the arrest of the punchinello was not the only one that had been effected since the ball had been opened, and the friends of various prisoners had come to claim them. Cassonade made way for his master through the assembly. The first face that they caught sight of on the doorstep was that of one of the detectives who had taken off his mask and clown's costume.

"Well?" said Cassonade, with a gesture of interrogation.

"They are waiting for you," replied the agent. "He is defending himself furiously, and the woman is even angrier than he is. We are going to take them to the lock-up."

"Let us go in at once," said the squire, dragging his master after him.

The hall they entered was full of camp beds upon which the men told off for duty at the station-house slept. In the middle, the three other detective agents were warming themselves around a stove, and the official who had control of the place was writing at a small table. The sound of drunken voices singing and uttering furious cries came from the next room, and clearly showed that it was used as a lock-up. All the men who had been turned out of the ball were there, and Cambremer at once thought that Bousenna had, perhaps, been able to turn this promiscuous intercourse to account.

"Here is my master, sir," said Cassonade, to the official.

The latter bowed very politely to the chevalier, and invited him to sit down upon a stool, the only seat there was in the ill-furnished place.

"Well, sir," said he, "I was told last night of the measures taken by my superiors to secure the arrest which has taken place, and I was only waiting for you to finish my report."

"I am ready to sign it, sir; but I have just been told that this man persists in denying—"

"That he is Monsieur Bousenna? Yes, that is true; he declares that he is the victim of a mistake, and I must say that he does not look much like a banker."

"He only calls himself one, and he has a face that suits his real business."

"Yes, yes; I have heard that he is the chief of a very dangerous band, and if everything that people say, when they are arrested, is to be believed, the prisons are full of innocent creatures. But you can now testify to his identity yourself."

"At last!" muttered Cambremer.

"Call the man first," said the official, to one of his men. "It would be better to question him alone, so that he may not come to an understanding with his sweetheart."

This sagacious suggestion was acted upon, and the man opened the door of the lock-up, calling out : " Come here, punchinello ! come here ! "

At this call the prisoner entered the room, and Cambremer drew back with surprise. He beheld a red and pimply face, which had not the least resemblance with the stern, swarthy features of M. Bousenna.

" What the mischief is up now ? " growled the red-faced fellow, in a thick voice. " Are they going to commence again as they did just now ? I tell you that I am Balandier, Polydore Balandier, and that I live at Montrouge. "

The chevalier was literally stunned, and his features so clearly expressed his amazement that the official asked him what was the matter.

" A mistake has been made, " stammered poor Cambremer ; " this isn't the man—and yet the description was exact. There now ! he still wears the red flower ! "

" What ? " interrupted the fellow, " is that the trifle that troubles you ? What of it ? Why shouldn't I wear a camellia in my button-hole when I'm a gardener by trade ? I gave one to my young woman too. "

The chevalier lacked the courage to say anything more. He felt sure that the man was lying, and that he belonged to the gang, but Bousenna had undoubtedly escaped him, and the blow was a hard one to bear.

" The mischief ! " now said the official, in a low tone ; " the mistake is an unlucky one. Well, let us see if we have had any better luck as regards the woman. "

At a sign from the official a policeman opened another door, that of the cell for the fair sex, and brought out the fish-wife, who came forward in a very leisurely manner. This time Cambremer experienced two opposite feelings ; in the first place, a disappointment as bitter as in the first instance, for the punchinello's companion did not resemble Bousenna's accomplice in the slightest degree ; and also a very lively curiosity, for it seemed to him that the woman's face was not unknown to him. " Come, Amanda, " said the punchinello ; " swear to these gentlemen that I am not a thief. "

" Amanda ! " exclaimed Cambremer, in amazement. " Yes ; it is she, indeed—the dressmaker of the Rue Sainte Barbe ! But the other—the one who assumed her name and took me to the private room— Ah ! it's she whom I ought to have arrested ! "

The official listened to this despairing soliloquy without understanding it at all. Cassonade had a glimpse of the truth, for he knew what had taken place at the ball between his master and the girl disguised as a folly

As for poor Chevalier Casse-Cou, he smote his forehead in despair, and muttered incoherently : " The wretches ! it is written that they shall always escape me. No ; this shall not be ! They must still be at the ball—I will find them ! Come, you must all help me to find them and arrest them ! "

These words were addressed to the policemen who did not seem to hear them. They were evidently waiting for orders from their superior.

" Excuse me, sir, " said the official, politely, " you yourself admit that there is a mistake, do you not ? How can you explain such a mistake ? "

" I cannot explain it. The information was as exact as possible, and unless that man Gévaudan is a traitor—"

" Aha ! that may be the case ! I heard about that man at headquarters to-day, and I now suspect that you did very wrong to confide in

him. Besides, I think that full information will be obtained about him to-day."

"Look here!" now called out the punchinello, "haven't you done talking over your little matters, you people? Do you think that I'm having a pleasant time of it here?"

"Hold your tongue!" replied the official, sternly; "you can reply when you are questioned."

"Come now; is it me, or isn't it me, that the man over there was looking for? If it ain't me, I want to go and dance again. Amanda's legs are jerking now."

"I don't know that man, it is true," said Cambremer, who had regained his self-possession to some extent; "but I am certain that he belongs to Bousenna's gang."

"'Belongs,' how 'belongs! what do you mean by 'belongs?' Never!" exclaimed the incorrigible punchinello.

"Be silent!"

This time the scamp held his peace, and the official resumed, addressing Cambremer: "What makes you believe that?"

"The red flower he wears, in the first place."

"Oh! if he is a gardener—"

"A gardener does not amuse himself with wearing his choicest flowers instead of selling them."

"Have you done, you stuck-up fellow?" now growled the punchinello.

"Then, again, there is his acquaintance with this woman, who lives at the lodging-house in the Rue Sainte Barbe, in the room which Bousenna's accomplice entered in view of murdering an unfortunate man who accompanied me."

"What have you to say to that, my beauty?" asked the official.

At this question, Mademoiselle Amanda—the real one—burst into tears. "Ah, my good sir!" she pleaded, "I swear to you that I did nothing whatever; you can make inquiries in the neighbourhood. It is true that I have a sweetheart, but after all, Polydore is an honest man—and he has promised to marry me."

This lamentable justification was interrupted by a fit of sobbing.

"Very well," said the official; "all that can be cleared up to-morrow; but, in the meantime, I am going to send you and your sweetheart to police head-quarters. If you are innocent you will get off with twenty-four hours at the Conciergerie, and that will teach you not to quarrel."

The fringe-maker received this sentence with a fresh out-burst of grief, and the punchinello wished to protest, but the policemen took them both by the shoulders and thrust them back into their respective cells.

"All this is really very strange," now said the official, "and I hardly know what to think."

"I do!" exclaimed Cambremer.

He had had time to reflect as to the occurrences of this eventful evening, and to recall certain facts, the correlation of which had at first escaped him. "What it all means is this," he resumed. "The letter which I received was a treacherous one. Did the man named Gévaudan write it? or has Bousenna found out my relations with him, and imitated his handwriting? That does not matter at this moment. However, the man and woman whom you have just questioned wore the red flower in order to mislead us, and they let themselves be arrested in order that the real Bousenna might escape our four men."

"Then they are accomplices of his?"

"Don't doubt it. The woman who just took me into a private room to tell me a story which she had concocted beforehand, is the very creature whom I have been pursuing for a month past, the abominable assistant of that rogue Bousenna."

"How is it that you failed to recognise her?"

"I had almost always seen her in male attire, and I need not tell you that she did not unmask."

"But didn't you know her voice?"

"I did not remember it; for I had only spoken once before to this woman though she had escaped me several times already."

"All this is very plausible; but I cannot clearly see what interest she had in taking you into the private room. If, when once you were there, her hirelings had come in to attack you, I should have understood the motive for the trick; but nothing of the kind happened, did it?"

"She had several reasons for enticing me into the room; but she wished, first of all, to propose to me to give up a child to her, a child for whom I would sacrifice my life, if need were, and also to abandon a young man whom I love as a son."

"That reason does not seem to me sufficient," said the official, shaking his head; "for she was well aware of your character, and must have been sure beforehand that you would refuse. Now, wretches of that description never make any idle attempts, so that—"

This remark was interrupted by Cassonade.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the squire, who, until then, had listened without saying a word; "what if this should be a plot to carry off the little girl while we are away?"

Cambremer turned deadly pale. The thought had so far not occurred to him, but he now remembered with terror that Biroulas's hirelings had made use of somewhat similar means to entice Paul Vernier away, and the Mongis ladies, as well, on the day when they had kidnapped little Baïa. However, on reflecting a moment, he considered that the circumstances were not altogether the same.

"No," he muttered, "no; it is impossible. Paul and our good neighbours are on their guard, and they will not allow themselves to be deceived."

"And, besides," remarked the official, who was used to legal deductions, "if they had merely wished to keep you away from home, they need not have let two of their accomplices be arrested. It would have differed had they given no sign of recognition to any one. You would have run all night after the red flower; they would have had plenty of time to do what they wished, and would not have exposed any of their gang to danger."

"Well, what more can I say?" exclaimed Cambremer, in a state of exasperation. "I have been caught in so many traps within the last few days that I feel bewildered. Still I wish to go back to that accursed ball, and even if I am obliged to tear the masks off the faces of all the worthless scoundrels there, I will find Bousenna!"

"You must be calm, sir," said the official, mildly, "and I know by experience that these things must not be hurried. If I were in your place, I should go quietly to bed, and to-morrow I should take the matter up again, beginning with the man in the Rue de la Lune. Besides, you appear ill, and I fancy that you need rest."

This last remark excited Cassonade's attention, and he glanced at his

master. He was terrified to see that he was frightfully pale. "What ails you, sir?" he asked, with anxiety.

"Me? Nothing—merely a nervous pain and a stiffness in my arm—the open air will do away with it."

The poor chevalier was mistaken, however, and his features which became more and more haggard, gave a flat denial to his words. At last he tottered, and was obliged to sit down again upon the stool which he had left to listen to the questioning of the punchinello.

"Bring a glass of water and some vinegar," said the official, to one of his men.

"Good heavens!" cried Cassonade, "what can be the matter with the chevalier? I have never seen him turn pale like this."

"Did you drink anything when you were in that room with the woman?" ask the functionary.

"No, nothing; she filled my glass, but I did not touch it."

"You did right not to touch any liquor; for such people are capable of anything. But no matter, so sudden an attack is very strange."

"Yes; I am suffering dreadfully," said Cambremer, speaking with a great effort.

"Where, sir?" asked Cassonade, coming forward to support him.

"I do not know. I feel as cold as ice all over, and—on my left shoulder—I feel as though a hot iron were lying there."

"Bring a doctor; a doctor must be sent for!" called out the squire, more and more alarmed.

"And this gentleman must be taken home at once," added the official. "I will send to inquire if there be any doctor at the ball; and, while one is being looked for, you had better send for your carriage."

These orders were given as quickly as possible by the functionary, who was a man of decision; and they came none too soon, for Cambremer was absolutely livid. He still had the strength to rise and walk to a camp-bedstead in a corner, but once there, he was obliged to lie down upon his back and remain motionless.

His halting breath seemed to hiss through his clenched teeth, and his brow was covered with icy sweat. Cassonade, in great distress, rubbed his hands and called him by name, but obtained no reply. The chevalier was gradually falling into a state of torpor.

"He caught this, whatever it may be, in the private room, and that girl did not take him there for nothing," muttered the official, who held on to his own belief.

Ten minutes passed without any marked change in the sufferer's state, and the faithful squire was feeling extremely anxious when the policemen who had been sent out returned. They brought with them a young man who said that he was a medical student, and they thought themselves very fortunate in having met him, for members of the medical faculty are not conspicuous as patrons of the Vendanges de Bourgogne.

This embryo doctor was attired in an Indian costume, with a head-dress of plumes, a necklace of shells, and a ring in his nose. However, an intelligent countenance was visible under his tattooing. He glanced at the sufferer, and walked quickly towards the bed.

"This man has been poisoned," he said to the official, after a cursory examination.

Although he spoke very low, Cassonade heard what he said, and asked himself whether it could really be true. A doctor dressed as a savage

does not inspire one with implicit confidence. However, the functionary shook his head with a grave air, and muttered: "I knew very well that there was some bad business under all this."

The medical student, meantime, had seized hold of Cambremer's arm, and felt his pulse, whilst watching, upon his face, the progress of the strange attack which had so suddenly paralyzed this strong and healthy man.

"Are you suffering much?" he asked in an eager tone.

"No," said Chevalier Casse-Cou, faintly; "but I should like to sleep."

"He complained just now of a sharp pain in his shoulder," said Cassonade, who had again approached to the bed.

"Where have I seen you before—you and your friend?" now asked the doctor, without ceasing to look at his patient.

"What! do you know us?" exclaimed the squire, who wondered where he could possibly have met this young man who was tattooed like a Sandwich Islander.

"Fifty-five pulsations!" muttered the student. "Something must be done! Ah! I remember," he added aloud. "You came the other day to the Hôtel-Dieu Hospital, when I was there."

Cassonade stepped back, so great was his surprise. He would have utterly failed to remember the young man belonging to the medical service of the hospital, so changed was he by his feather head-dress. It was, however, the same assistant house surgeon who had attended the unfortunate Baluchon in his last moments.

"There is no nausea," resumed the young practitioner; "and it cannot be opium-poisoning. Didn't you say that he complained of pain somewhere?"

"Yes; here, in his right shoulder."

"Let us look at it, then."

So saying the young fellow touched the injured portion of the chevalier's shoulder very lightly; as he did so, Cambremer uttered a groan of pain.

"This is strange! Can there be an external injury?"

"I know that he was stabbed with a knife which only grazed his skin. Look! a rent in his coat is still visible," said Cassonade.

"Ah! I see; I find a mark between the fifth and sixth rib. The knife must have slipped on the sternum; but this place does not seem to be sensitive."

"Oh! he hardly felt the stab at the moment, and did not complain of it afterwards."

"Let us look elsewhere."

Then, with remarkable dexterity, the young hospital doctor unbuttoned our hero's harlequin-dress, and uncovered his chest. Cambremer's carnival-costume was all in one piece, and could easily be opened when he was raised up. Cassonade put his arms around his master, and brought him into a sitting posture while the student removed his bright costume. The chevalier's shirt was then seen with a small red spot near his right shoulder. "Ah! I think we have found the place," now exclaimed the young doctor.

Our hero's shirt was then swiftly taken off, and it was seen that his skin on the shoulder and arm had assumed a bluish tint, at sight of which Cassonade recoiled with horror.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed; "it looks like a serpent's bite."

"That snake had no scales, but it was none the less harmful for that. Look: do you see the wound?"

In the middle of the livid discolouration of the skin there was a black

spot, around which the flesh had greatly swollen. It was evident that some subtle poison had brought this about.

"Stranger and stranger!" muttered the young medical man, bending over to examine the wound more closely.

"But, for Heaven's sake, what has happened?" asked Cassonade.

"Your friend has been pricked with a poisoned pin or lance, possibly with a very sharp arrow."

"An arrow! at a ball! That is impossible!"

"The fact is, that those that I carry in my Indian quiver are not at all dangerous; but I merely mentioned an arrow because I believe that I have found symptoms of a poison which savages make use of."

"Look, sir!" suddenly exclaimed Cassonade, "what is that under your hand?"

At this exclamation the hospital doctor gave up his examination of the wound to look in the direction towards which the squire was pointing. The harlequin-costume which he had just thrown upon the camp-bed, also had a black spot upon it—the more visible from the fact that it was in the middle of one of the red squares in the pattern. The young man stretched out his hand, and his fingers came in contact with a small object which he hastily seized hold of. "Ah! I have caught the snake!" he exclaimed, triumphantly pulling out a pin pricked into the costume.

"What! can it be that pin?"

"Of course it is. Look at the point."

Cassonade took care not to let go of the chevalier about whom he had his arms; however, the official pounced upon the proof which the student held out to him.

"This pin does, indeed, appear to be covered with a kind of brown wax," said he, "but there is nothing to show that this wax caused the poisoning."

"I will explain it to you presently, sir; the thing to be done now is to cauterize the wound at once. Is there a hot iron anywhere in the office?"

"No, but we can heat the poker."

"That would take a long time. In the meantime give me some string."

The policeman hastened to produce some, whereupon the young medical man began to press Cambremer's shoulder vigorously, passing the string under his armpit. While he did so, he kept his eye upon his patient, and shook his head as though he did not think his condition encouraging. But little good could be expected of the tardy operation now begun, for the chevalier's breathing was becoming more and more oppressed.

"You see that he is dying?" exclaimed Cassonade, in despair.

"I hope not," replied the student, without showing any anxiety; "it will depend upon the time required to heat the poker."

"What if I suck the wound?"

"That won't do much good, my good fellow, but I will not prevent your trying it."

The faithful servant did not need to be told twice. He laid his master gently back upon the bed, and threw himself upon his knees beside him.

The hospital doctor had finished his preliminaries, and was now stirring up the fire in the stove. The chevalier's injured arm hung outside of the bed, and none of the others present showed the least disposition to rival Cassonade in the dangerous feat of saving Casse-Cou's life.

The good squire applied his lips to the wound, and sucked at it with all his strength.

The guard-house at this moment presented a singular appearance. A man, naked to the waist, with the fantastic dress of a harlequin lying near him, and a "wharf-rat" kneeling by his side; while a red Indian poked the fire with an iron bar, which he seemed to be preparing for some work of torture—all this made up a picture which a chance observer would have utterly failed to understand.

"Tell me, sir," now said the official, in the young medical man's ear, "are you not afraid that that poor fellow will be poisoned by what he is doing?"

"Oh! there's little danger of that, for the poison we have to deal with doesn't kill any one unless it gets into the blood."

"All the same, I should not like to try it!"

"However, I am afraid that his devotion will do no good."

"Why, look! the patient seems to be better already!"

Cambremer seemed, indeed, to breathe more freely; he had opened his eyes and was looking about him in surprise. A man awaking from a long dream could not have seemed more bewildered by the scene in which one and all were so much interested.

"I see, I see!" muttered the young doctor; "it appears that the absorption is slower than I thought. Orfila must be wrong in saying, in his work on poisons, that five minutes suffice to—"

"Where am I?" now asked Cambremer, with a sigh.

The most delicious music would not have been so sweet to Cassonade as the sound of these words. He stopped short in his work of salvation for a moment, and joyously exclaimed:

"You are with your friends, Monsieur Francis, and we shall save your life, God willing!"

"Come, my good man," said the student, "make room for me now. The poker is at a white heat, and I don't want to let it get cold."

Cassonade very reluctantly gave up his place and longed to raise some objection to the exceedingly painful operation which was now about to be performed.

"It must be done," said the young medical man, coming near the bed with the poker in his hand. "It must be done, or death will ensue."

The poor squire did not dare to reply. He let go of the patient's arm, and the chevalier's flesh, which was deeply cauterized, fairly smoked when the burning-hot iron touched it. The chevalier was truly heroic. He did not speak or cry out; in a word, he remained as calm under suffering as though it had been inflicted upon some one else.

"Do you feel better?" now asked the official.

"Yes," stammered Cambremer; "I don't feel that coldness at the heart any longer. It seems to me as though I had come to life again."

There was scarcely need to say this, for even a person unacquainted with medical matters could have seen that the heroic remedy had proved successful. Colour was visibly returning to the chevalier's face, his eyes brightened, and he began to breathe freely; it appeared, indeed, as if life was gradually coming back to the body so recently prostrated by the poison.

"I am beginning to think that we shall save him," said the student, in a low tone.

"Upon my word, young man, you may flatter yourself that you have done a wonderful thing!" said the official.

"Oh! this is not all; I promise you that I won't leave the patient till he is able to be up and about. One does not have a chance every day to

study so interesting a case. Just fancy ! that poison comes from the coast of Orinoco."

"Then you really think it was administered with that black pin?"

"I am sure of it; and I count upon having it analyzed at the laboratory of the Medical School. Indeed, we shall thoroughly examine that nice brown substance on the point of the pin."

At this moment, Cambremer, who was listening and sitting up on the camp-bedstead, exclaimed in a hoarse voice:

"Heaven be praised! I now know how that wretch killed Baïa's mother!"

VII.

HOW PIERRE MORILLON FOUND A MAN WHILE LOOKING FOR A HORSE.

PIERRE MORILLON was always punctual in obeying orders, and even for the sake of a new cabriolet he would not have failed to repair to the Rue Férou at the time appointed by Chevalier Casse-Cou. When the party led by Cambremer left the Rue de Vaugirard for the ball, it had been agreed that Jacqueline's husband should go to the house in the morning to ascertain the result of the night expedition.

He felt the greatest interest in his friend Cassonade, and he had the deepest veneration for Cambremer. So he scarcely closed his eyes all night. His wife herself was not without anxiety, and could not go to sleep until she had heard what the plans of Paul Vernier's protector were. At daybreak, the good couple were already afoot, and if Morillon had been free to do as his impatience suggested, he would have gone at once to the Rue Férou. But Jacqueline wisely suggested that at so early an hour he ran the risk of finding every one still in bed.

Whatever success he might have met with, Cambremer would certainly be very much fatigued on his return, and Morillon thought it best to give him time to rest. But, like all persons who are impatient to hear important news, he could not keep still. Vainly did he furbish up his harness and rub down his mare, he could not help being restless. La Grise, besides, had been causing him great anxiety for some days past. The fall she had met with in the Rue Montorgueil had been followed by disastrous consequences, and, in spite of the ointments prescribed by a veterinary surgeon, the poor beast suffered throughout the entire week.

Chevalier Casse-Cou had promised to pay for all the damage done by the accident, but the worthy cab-driver was discreet in availing himself of these offers of service. He was willing that his generous patron should pay the wheelwright, but would not accept anything more than that. He had, besides, a plan which he had not confided to any one. A day of rest is always a lost day to a cab-driver; now, it might be, that La Grise would not be able to get about for a week, and her master's kindness did not prevent him from regretting his daily earnings. It happened though that Pierre had some money laid by in an old woollen stocking, and he now intended to use it in buying a new horse to take the old mare's place. Not that he wished to do without her; but he said to himself that he might possibly be able to procure a horse which he might use while La Grise was ailing. There was nothing to prevent his selling such an animal again without too great a loss, and, thanks to this ingenious plan, the

famous yellow cab might, on the following day, begin its rounds once more.

With this wise intention he resolved to profit by the morning hours to repair to the horse-market and look about him. Jacqueline recommended him to be careful to give only a reasonable price, and to treat the man he bought the horse of in moderation. Having promised all that his wife desired, Morillon started off with his pipe in his mouth, proceeding towards the Boulevard de l'Hopital.

In those days a horse fair was held there twice a week. The ground upon which a long boulevard has recently been arranged then formed a long parallelogram adorned with two or three rows of miserable trees. Some boards with rings fixed to them to tie up the animals for sale, and a stone watering-trough indicated the purposes for which the spot was intended. It was always deserted after ten in the morning, by which time business was over.

Morillon reached it at the moment when there was the most stir, and he was somewhat surprised to find so many people there as this was the morrow of Shrove-Tuesday. Horse-dealers, to be sure, cared little for the pleasures of the Carnival, and that day the market was full of people who seemed to have preferred to attend to business instead of witnessing the "Descente de la Courtille."

There was buying and selling, and haggling and paying, and withal a terrible hubbub, for the public at fairs is invariably a noisy one. In a word, the sight was a stirring one, made up, as it was, of men and horses.

The crowd opened every moment to allow some fine trotter to be exhibited by some dealer in a blouse and cotton cap, which told of Normandy a mile off. There was no talk in those days of "English thoroughbreds," and the most fastidious purchasers contented themselves with horses from Caen.

Pierre, for that matter, did not even set his pretensions so high, and all that he now modestly aimed at was the purchase of some poor old beast costing but three hundred francs or so, and still able to do a little work. He began to look around him, with that air of indifference which all those who frequent horse sales assume to hide their desire to buy, and began his inspection by approaching the corner where the best horse-dealers stood. He went about with his hands in his pockets, his whip curled round his neck, and he passed up and down wherever there was a gathering, so as to hear what was being said about the four-footed merchandise.

What he did hear did not seem to him to argue well for his purchase. Those present were complaining of the high prices, and declaring that the most pitiable old hacks were put up at three times their value. "I have been all through the market," said one stout man with a red face, "and I have found nothing but old carcasses that are offered for a hundred pistoles, as though they were worth that amount."

"Oh! there is a man down there," resumed a groom who was with him, "who is willing to sell two animals from Le Perche together or separately; they are sound and swift, and I think that he would let them go cheap, for he seems to be in a deuce of a hurry to sell them."

"Yes; in too great a hurry for me to buy them. I have already been taken in with a hasty purchase like that, and that fellow looks to me as though he had stolen those animals."

"Is he a tall, thin man, with a Bolivar hat, and a nut-coloured coat?" asked another horse-dealer.

"Yes, that's the chap. I never saw his phiz in the market before, and I'll bet a sack of oats that if he's asked for his address he won't give it."

This talk, which Morillon caught on the fly, interested him but little however, he continued walking on, thinking that he might, perhaps, find a cheap purchase with the dealer who was so desirous of selling. As he went along, he inquired the price of every animal that seemed to suit him, but he was asked such high terms that he did not attempt to purchase any of them.

However, at a hundred yards or so from where the more important sales were going on, he caught sight of a stable-boy who had hold of a fine chestnut mare, and was making it trot round. This was idle work, for, at the moment, no one was looking on. Morillon, who was aware that the animal was a good one, was surprised at this, and thought that he would inquire about it, at all events.

"There are a pair of them," said the young ostler; "but the owner down there is selling the other one, and says that he will let this one go at four hundred and fifty francs."

This was much dearer than Pierre had thought of paying; but the mare, in point of fact, was worth eight hundred francs, and to effect such a bargain it was worth his while giving beyond his terms. He began to look at the legs of the neglected Percheron mare, to see if she had not some defect, but could not find any. He was, however, struck with one peculiarity in the animal's hide. It had what the jockeys call "socks and ribbons," which is to say that all its pasterns were white, and its forehead had a blaze upon it.

"The other is marked in the same way," said the boy; "and it is really a pity to part them. The owner must imagine that oats are going up this year, for he is in a great hurry to get rid of them."

This information opened Morillon's eyes. He had felt very suspicious a moment before, as two animals so well matched are not to be met with every day; and now he remembered that, on a certain memorable night, he had driven two such mares with precisely the same markings. The animals harnessed to the carriage in which Chevalier Casse-Cou had passed such hours of agony on the Quai de l'Île Saint Louis, had been marked in this way. Morillon had not driven them long, and upon reaching the coach-house in the Rue de Vaugirard, he had not amused himself with examining the steed which had saved his life. But, when a man has spent many years among horses, he can recognise any particular animal at a glance, and he remembered perfectly well how these two had looked. It will be remembered that the carriage and team had been stolen from Jacqueline's husband by the crafty Pavard, who, after holding on behind, had had the effrontery to whistle to the mares when they reached his enemy's door.

"It must be he!" thought Morillon; "it must be that good-for-nothing rascal, whom I thought I had dealt so good a kick at. He has very good reasons for selling his animals cheap, the scoundrel! But this time I'll chime in!"

The question was to recognise him, and Pierre was not at all sure of being able to do so. He had scarcely seen the scamp's face during the short struggle between them for the possession of the seat on the box; and now, to be more sure on the point, he was tempted to question the stable-boy. However, the latter was no more than a mere hireling, who worked

for everybody about the market, and he would scarcely be able to impart any reliable information.

"It's the first time I've ever seen that man about here ;" said the youngster, on being questioned, "but he's not so mean as those skinflints the Normans ; for he has already treated me, and he says that he'll give me two francs after the sale."

After this Pierre had no further doubt, and, like a wise man, he now sought for the best means of profiting by this unexpected encounter. While he was deliberating, the stable-boy added :

"If you wish to deal with him, now's your chance. I see him coming back, and he must have sold his other mare at a good price, for he's in a good-humour, I see."

The stable-boy was right, for the owner of the mare with the white socks came forward with a smiling air. Morillon saw him from afar, and only half recognised him. He thought that he detected a vague resemblance between his appearance, and that of the scoundrel whom he had kicked on the Quai d'Anjou ; but as to his face, there was great difficulty in recalling it, for the kidnapping affair had taken place at night, and in darkness. This uncertainty greatly annoyed him, as it prevented him from arresting M. Bousenna's presumed accomplice on the spot. There was one compensation, however. The man could not have seen him very clearly at night, and there was a chance that he would not suspect that he had met him before, or recognise him in his chance customer at the horse-fair.

Pierre, therefore, resolved to play his part as a buyer as naturally as possible, and to take advantage of the bargaining to study the man who had the mare to sell.

"Oho ! my swell, it's catching ! Have you found a customer ?" called out the man, in a hoarse voice.

"Yes, sir, here's some one who wants to talk to you !" replied the boy.

"Wait till I put away my money, and then I'll come to you."

The pretended dealer was, in fact, busy stowing away a canvas bag, apparently filled with money. This was not easy, for there appeared to be a great accumulation of anomalous articles in his pocket.

Morillon saw him take out a big handkerchief with blue and red squares, a clay pipe, a tobacco-pouch, and pocket-book of well-worn leather. The bag once dropped into the depths of his overcoat, he put all the miscellaneous articles back again on the top of it, and came swaggering up to his new customer.

"Well, my fine fellow, are we going to drive a bargain ?" said he to Morillon, who had his eye upon him.

"That depends upon the price."

"Five hundred francs ; and that's a mere nothing for an animal not yet six years old, sound as a nut, and what a pacer !"

Jacqueline's husband was apparently occupied in examining the mare's teeth, but he was, in reality, less concerned in verifying the animal's age, than in studying the owner. The pretended horse-dealer was a man of forty or so, with a long, thin face, surrounded by whiskers of a bright red, and lit up by grey eyes that never looked anyone in the face. One detail of his costume struck Morillon at once, and most of all. It was an immense hat with a high crown, a turned-up brim, and rolled edges, covered with a nap which had grown red with age, and which must have had rough usage to judge from its appearance. Pierre had, assuredly, met people

in the Paris streets with hats as bad as this one, but he could not get it out of his head that the head-gear in question still bore the marks of his own boot.

He was, however, obliged to admit that this was no sufficient reason for arresting a man, and he tried to find out something more.

"The mare isn't a bad one," said he; but the thing is whether she can go well."

"Fifteen miles an hour, my little one, and without a snap of the whip."

"Harnessed or ridden?"

"As you please. She took me once from Montrouge to Montmartre in twenty-five minutes, and I'm by no means a light weight. As for drawing a carriage, you never saw her match. With the other one that I've just sold, she drew a travelling-coach with six persons in it, as though it had been a feather."

"I don't dispute it, but five hundred francs is a good bit of money."

"The pair cost three thousand. They were bought last year at the fair at Chartres."

Morillon raised his head, and looked the speaker in the face; but the dealer probably saw that he had said something foolish, for he added, in a surly tone: "Never mind! do you wish to buy or not? I didn't come here to brag. If you want the animal, name a price; if not, be off. I shall sell her fast enough."

"Three hundred francs, and not a copper more," said Pierre, who was sure of being refused.

He had made up his mind on the instant to break off the bargain, and to follow the suspicious owner from afar. Whether he took his horse away or succeeded in selling it, the man must go somewhere or other, and by keeping after him, Pierre might find out something useful as to his real personality.

"Three hundred francs for an animal worth fifteen hundred! Do you take me for a fool?" now exclaimed the pretended dealer.

"As you please. I am not rich, and if my terms don't suit you, I can find what I want elsewhere. I saw down there by the water-trough a big mare which I can get for a hundred and eighty francs."

"The dence you can!" growled the dealer; "it makes me sweat to sell a Percheron mare for a mere nothing. Ah! if I did not have to leave Paris, I would make her work for me, and I'd coin money, too!"

"Well, I see that we shall not come to an understanding," said Morillon, starting as if to go away.

"Say four hundred, and you shall have her," said the man with the huge hat.

"Three hundred francs, not a son more."

"Three hundred and fifty?"

"I cannot do it," replied the cab-driver, who, by refusing, was delighted at the prospect of being able to mix with the crowd and watch his man from afar.

"Well, then, a thousand devils fly away with you! take her for the three hundred, and begone!" cried the dealer.

This unexpected conclusion upset all Morillon's plans, and he had a great mind to go off without turning back; but he reflected that his refusal would seem very unnatural when such a bargain was offered him, and that the man might suspect him of peculiar intentions. It would be better to delay matters, and find some new way of getting out of the matter; for

Pierre set his own interests aside for those of his friends in the Rue Férou, and, however advantageous the purchase might be, he did not wish to have to take the mare away with him.

He could not follow the man with the animal coming after him, and to conclude the bargain meant abandoning a pursuit from which he expected good results. He, therefore, walked back, and quietly said :

"Well, at that price, we may, perhaps, agree, and I'll treat you into the bargain."

"I've no time to lose, and all I want is my money," growled the dealer.

"Oh ! it won't take long ; we'll go to a place I'm acquainted with. There's some green-seal there that will make you open your eyes."

"What ! stop on my way ! What an idea ! You must put down my three hundred francs, and take the animal off with you."

"But I haven't the money here, and I always pay everything at my house. However, I don't live far off, and in half an hour we—"

The dealer, while listening, had turned as red as a boiled crab, and with a fierce blow of his fist he set his huge hat upon the back of his head, and snatched his whip from the stable-boy.

"At your house !" he shouted furiously ; "you only pay at your house ! What do you take me for, you country-jake ? Do you think that I'm going to travel all the way to your house ?"

"Upon my word, you can do as you like," said Morillon, who was congratulating himself upon the success of his trick.

"Go home, you old pauper ! Go and look for your cash in your wife's old stocking ! Come on, my Percheron !" added the angry man, giving the mare a sharp lashing on the legs.

It was a cruel way of treating a poor, harmless beast, and it had most disastrous results for the owner, for the mare replied by a terrible kick that came full in his chest, and sent him three feet off. Morillon yielded to a natural and charitable impulse in rushing to help him up, but he had only to look at the man to see that if he was not dead, he was not far from it. He was vomiting blood, and writhing in the final convulsions of death.

While the worthy cab-driver was trying to raise him up, he found something under his hand. It was the black pocket-book which had fallen from the man's pocket as he sank to the ground. The stable-boy had let go of the mare to run to help the man who had promised him so good a fee. At the same time, the accident drew several persons from the crowd, and the blood-covered body was soon the centre of a large group of spectators.

The sight of death is always impressive, and Morillon felt some compassion for the wretch who lay upon the ground ; but he did not forget the interests of his friends. The pocket-book which had thus fallen in his way, contained, perhaps the secret which Cambremer wanted to unravel. The temptation was too strong, and Pierre could not resist it. He put the "proof," into his pocket, without any scruple in doing so ; and in the midst of the tumult produced by the accident, no one noticed what he was about. Meanwhile, the crowd grew denser and denser, and the officials charged with keeping order in the market had great trouble in carrying out their duties. As for Morillon, he took advantage of the uproar to escape.

VIII.

WHAT THE POCKET-BOOK CONTAINED.

CAMBREMER had been brought home in an alarming, though not a desperate state. The young medical man's hot iron had completed what Cassonade's devotion had so well begun, that is to say, the effects of the poison had been arrested, and did not extend beyond the shoulder and arm.

The removal of the sufferer had been effected at about three o'clock in the morning, and very satisfactorily.

The young practitioner would not leave his patient, but bravely seated himself beside him in the carriage in his Indian costume. Fortunately, the inhabitants of the Rue Férou had for some time been sleeping the "sleep of the just," when the strange party entered the house where Cambremer resided, or the whole neighbourhood would have repaired to the windows to see a wounded harlequin borne along by a "wharf-rat" and a redskin.

Cassonade would not awaken the ladies on the second floor, and Paul Vernier, who slept in the chevalier's rooms, was the only person disagreeably surprised by this sad return home. The young man was soon informed of the strange events of the night, and he would not allow anyone else to watch over his protector. All that he would consent to was that the faithful squire should share his duties as an attendant upon him.

As for the hospital doctor, he asked to be allowed to take his feather head-dress and flesh-coloured tights back to the costumier of whom he had hired them, and, once rid of this wild attire, he resumed his place at Cambremer's bedside. He clung to his patient for two reasons: the first, because he had effected a cure of which he took all the honour to himself; the second, because he found it to be one of those exceptional cases which physicians always prize. It is not often that a young man completing his course of study in the Parisian hospitals comes across a case of poisoning with a plant from beyond the Atlantic, and Dupuytren's pupil had already thought of writing a brilliant thesis upon the case, and reading it before the Faculty.

When Cambremer awoke, towards eight in the morning, he saw only agreeable faces around him. Madame Mongis and her daughter had now been made acquainted with the events of that terrible Shrove-Tuesday, and they had already sworn to oppose any fresh enterprise of the chevalier's with all their power. It is needless to add that they hastened to their neighbour's room with Baïa, and waited with natural anxiety for the moment when the heavy sleep in which he had lain for several hours should cease.

They had a pleasant surprise ready for him, for, when he opened his eyes, Martha took the little girl and raised her up high enough for him to see her. There was a long embrace, and tears and exclamations of joy burst forth when the poor child and the man who had once more risked his life for her thus met.

Baïa repeated the name of Francis, which she now knew how to pronounce perfectly well, and she even added a few words in French, which showed her rapid progress in a language still new to her. Cambremer murmured words of gratitude to heaven, and then thanked his friends with all the emotion that a man feels who has believed himself lost.

He was only quieted when the young representative of medical science insisted that the agitation was very harmful to him.

"Well, my dear patient," added the embryo practitioner, smiling, "how do you feel after this rude shock?"

"I have no pain," replied Cambremer. "I only feel a numbness in my arm, and some prickings at the end of my fingers."

"Yes; that is the poison; it is its last effect. It will go as it came, and you may flatter yourself that you have had a narrow escape. If that worthy man here had not done as he did, I fear that my cauterisation would have been too late."

Chevalier Casse-Cou thanked his squire with an eloquent glance, and then inquired, with great earnestness: "Do you really think, sir, that the pin itself was poisoned?"

"I have no doubt of it, and I am even aware what the poison is, although it is but little known in France. It is *curare*."

"*Curare*?" repeated Cambremer, to whom the word was new.

"It is compounded of the venom of a serpent, and the juice of certain poisonous plants. Such, at least, is the opinion of the Academy of Medicine; for, between ourselves, there has never been a successful chemical analysis of this poison; still, its effects are perfectly well known, and they are almost lightning-like. Ah! you were lucky in being dressed from head to foot."

"Why?"

"Because the pin, in piercing your harlequin dress, left some grains of the poison adhering to it upon the garment; and, besides, it merely reached the skin. If the prick had penetrated the naked flesh, you could not have lived five minutes."

"Ah!" exclaimed Chevalier Casse-Cou, "that is the way in which he killed her. Her evening-dress left her neck and shoulders exposed. She must have died on the instant."

Of all those present, the young medical man was the only person who did not know to what event Cambremer alluded. "I have taken notes of all this," he said, with a triumphant air; "and I'll answer for it that to-morrow your case will be talked of at the Hôtel Dieu Hospital. The police officials asked to keep the pin, as a proof of what had been done; but when they knew that the Medical School would be interested, to a man, in the matter, they let me have it, making me promise to give it back when required."

"Oh!" said Cassonade, "it was not merely to be agreeable to your professors that the officials consented to let you have the pin. Those police-officers, you see, have hard heads, and that one did not believe much in the poisoning."

"He will believe in it in a week from now, when he hears of the report that will be read in public."

The officer's incredulity did not trouble Cambremer, but, as his memory returned, he thought over all the details of his adventure, and wished to learn what had happened after he had lost consciousness at the police station, for he knew nothing of what had passed, and did not wish to remain any longer in ignorance.

"Were those rascals caught? Were they looked for? What became of the maskers who were arrested in their place?"

These hurried questions were addressed to Cassonade.

"You can speak before this gentleman," added Chevalier Casse-Cou, seeing that his squire hesitated to reply.

"I do not know much about all that," said the discreet retainer. "We were all occupied with you, and not with those scoundrels. But I saw the two policeman who were sent to the ball when they came back, and they told their superior that none of the dancers in the quadrille had reappeared. As for the punchinello and the fish-wife, they must have been sent to police-headquarters this morning; and probably we shall hear some news of them in the course of the day."

"What of the man in the Rue de la Lune—what of Gévaudan?"

"The commissary of police must have been informed of what took place last night at the Vendanges de Bourgogne, and I should not be surprised if he came down upon our adviser this morning."

The turn that the conversation had taken showed the young medical man that his presence was no longer indispensable, indeed, that he was in the way of his patient. He was anxious, besides, to go to his professors and show them the pin, so he took his leave, recommending rest instead of medicine, and promising to return that evening.

The squire, who went to the door with him, found himself face to face, upon the landing, with Morillon, who came in breathless with haste. The worthy cab-driver did not look nearly so unconcerned as usual, and indeed his solemn air astonished Cassonade greatly.

"I think I have found out a secret," said he, in a tone of mystery. "Has Monsieur Cambremer returned?"

"Yes, and luckily he's still alive."

"Good heavens! What has happened to him, then?"

"You will soon hear. Come and tell him what you have found out; that's the main thing."

Then, without losing time in explanations, Cassonade pushed his friend into the bedroom.

Morillon was astounded at seeing the chevalier in bed; but he did not venture to ask any questions, and after a few expressions of pity, he began the story of his journey to the horse fair. Cambremer listened with feverish attention. He seemed to guess the importance of the discovery made by Jacqueline's husband, and as soon as the pocket-book was spoken of, he abruptly sat up, exclaiming:

"Where is it? Give it to me; give it to me at once."

It would be difficult to describe the eagerness with which Morillon's short story was listened to. No one, not even Madame Mongis, doubted but what the horse-dealer was the man Pavard who had been so much sought for after the death of his accomplice, Baluchon, at the Hôtel-Dieu Hospital; and the coincidence was so striking that every one was startled by it.

The eagerness of the group about the bed may be imagined when Cambremer opened the pocket-book which Pierre gave him. The worthy cab-driver had had the courage to seize upon the object itself, but he had been careful not to examine it, in fact, he had brought it exactly as it had fallen from the dead man's pocket.

It was not at all like the portfolio of a minister, nor even like the note-book of a broker on Change. It was a shapeless affair, consisting of two leaves of black-leather, held together by a mere string. This worn envelope served to keep together a variety of papers of different lengths and colours. Cambremer examined it for an instant with an interest shared by one and all, and when he unfastened the bit of coarse string, there was an almost solemn silence.

Even little Baïa shared in the general anxiety. She attentively followed the operation as though she had guessed that the old worn out pocket-book would decide her fate. "Help me, my dear Paul," said the chevalier, who would have found it difficult to unfold all the papers without being assisted.

The young man took up the largest of the sheets of paper, opened it, and spread it before Cambremer, who exclaimed with delight. "It was really he!"

The paper which he was reading was a passport with the name of Auguste Zéphyrin Pavard upon it.

The fellow's identity was no longer doubtful; but on this official document the dead man was described as a "commercial traveller," and this pursuit was not in accordance with the conduct which he was known to have indulged in. The given age of Pavard was forty-five; his place of birth was Paris, and the description of his person was altogether in conformity with that of the sham horse-dealer. Everything was regular in this paper by which the mayor of Vannes, in Morbihan, ordered the civil and military authorities—according to the usual formula—to allow the bearer, who was going to Chartres, to travel on, and to help and protect him, if necessary.

There were two or three seals with fleur-de-lis upon them, and the date was June 17, 1830. Moreover there was this marginal note: "Given on presentation of an old passport."

Cambremer read it through, and his face lit up as he went on with his perusal, which he found a thousand times more interesting than his precious romances of chivalry.

"This coincides with what we know;" he muttered, "the retreat of that scoundrel Bousenna must be in the midst of the plains of Morbihan, he smuggles along the coast between the mouth of the Vilaine and that of the river of Quimperlé: this man Pavard was one of his agents, and he must have procured this passport to come to Paris where he was probably serving as the agent of the gang in the provinces."

"This is very vague," said the sceptical Cassonade, in a low tone.

"What? don't you see that we can have all the information we desire from the mayor at Vannes, or find the old passport which he exchanged for this one, at all events?"

The squire did not venture to reply. He contented himself with thinking that Brittany was very far off, that M. Bousenna had probably gone there, and that it would be prudent not to go after him.

Meanwhile Paul continued the inventory and successively produced some bills, half-a-dozen pawn-tickets, and a great many cards with red and black spots, which Pavard had probably pocketed after playing at one of the Palais-Royal gambling halls. Nothing in all this gave any fresh cleue. The habits of the man were evident, but his abode was not yet made known.

The taverns where he had been in the habit of taking his meals were, according to the bills, in the neighbourhood of the Palais-Royal, in the Rue Monfietard, and in different suburbs. It might be inferred from this that the deceased had no fixed habits, and that he was probably unknown at the low places where he lunched or dined.

The papers which were next unfolded were notes, and contained nothing but sentences written in a very legible hand, but unintelligible in themselves. There was almost always a line with an hour and place, sometimes also some Christian name and some strange appellation. For instance "A

quarter to twelve. Pointe Eustache. François. The big fat fellow. The crooked fellow. Alfred."

It was evident that all this alluded to matters of a criminal nature entrusted to different members of the gang, and that the necessary instructions were given in these laconic terms by the chief and leader; however nothing revealed the secret of these mysterious appointments. Then again the words were replaced by figures of which it was idle to attempt to guess the meaning.

Cambremer went rapidly through these mysterious notes, and was beginning to feel afraid that he would not find the information of which he was in search, when Paul Vernier handed him a letter that seemed to be of some length. The freshness of the paper showed that it had not been long in Pavard's pocket, so that it must refer to late occurrences.

The chevalier had not read many lines before he uttered a cry of mingled surprise and delight. "Is it a letter from that man Bousenna?" asked Madame Mongis, in anxiety.

"Better still!"

"What can it be?"

"His instructions to his rascally agent. Listen."

Thereupon Cambremer began to read aloud, and not without his voice trembling somewhat: "We must decidedly clear out to-morrow. I shut up the last shop to-day. You have three days to settle the affairs that you know of, but, above all, no mistakes. It would be better to miss the matter in the Rue Férou than to get arrested. That fool of a Baluchon has already done us harm enough. Besides, if you cannot settle the matter of the little girl, I will have a certificate of death forged by our No. 41, who has already forged one concerning her mother. We shall then be in readiness for the 12th of March, and the notary won't suspect anything. Still, I should prefer to be sure that the seed of the Porspoder is destroyed. You must do the best that you can, but on Saturday, at the latest, you must be beyond the Barrière—"

"He ordered him to kill Baïa!" said Martha, with a start of terror.

"Fortunately the chestnut mare undertook to prevent that," muttered the practical minded Cassonade.

"We are not at an end yet," resumed Cambremer, going on with his reading: "We will rid you altogether of the tall lanky fellow who has been annoying us for a month past. Everything is ready for dispatching him. Yamina will undertake to give the gentleman a *prick with a pin*. You will then only have the servant and the two women to deal with. If you cannot conquer them, the devil must be in it all, and you do not believe in the devil any more than I do. As for that pretty Paul, there is nothing to be done just now."

Martha turned pale as she heard her lover's name among the condemned. However, the chevalier gave her an encouraging look, and slowly continued:

"I will arrange matters so that he may end as his father did. Meantime, you must post the letter that is inclosed in this one. It won't do much good just now, but it may help us later on. There is a nice little sum to be made in that way, and if you behave well, you shall have your share."

"I do not understand this part," said Cassonade, simply.

"Now that you know my intentions," resumed the reader, "this is the order of march. You must start on Saturday, or Friday, if you are able.

We will wait for you to begin. The great centre is still at Sucinio, but you must pass first through the Chênaie Ététée. Try to be there at nightfall. I do not know exactly how matters are going on down there, and we must always be on our guard. If everything does go on as I wish, I shall dispose of the country business also, and in a month's time we can cross the Straits of Gibraltar. You will see whether the climate suits you. I forgot to tell you that you may sell the two horses and the vehicle. I make you a present of them to pay your travelling expenses, but keep your eyes open when you make your bargain."

"It was not a very good bargain for him," said Cassonade.

This philosophical reflection met with no reply. The letter which Cambremer had read had petrified Martha's mother with horror, and Jacqueline's husband as well.

There was surely reason to tremble at the remembrance of the man Bousenna, who, in his quiet office on the Boulevard Bonne Nouvelle, had ordered assassins about like the "Old Man of the Mountain."

"Let me look at that sealed paper," said the chevalier, pointing to a large envelope.

Paul Vernier took it up and turned pale as he read the superscription. It was addressed to the Public Prosecutor, at his office, at the Palais de Justice, in Paris."

This envelope with a large red seal had a formidable appearance. It looked as though it might be an order of execution.

Such was Paul Vernier's thought, and the address upon it was not calculated to encourage him. His hand trembled as he broke the seal, and the papers fell out. The first that he saw was the printed acknowledgment upon which he had had the weakness to write M. Bousenna's name. The poor youth was overwhelmed when he saw this testimony of a crime so bitterly regretted. Before he had time for thought, however, Cambremer had seized another paper written upon a large sheet and began to read aloud :

"To the Public Prosecutor :

"SIR,—I think it right to bring before your notice the culpable act of which one of my clerks has just been guilty. This individual—named Vernier—Paul Ernest—and to whom I had given the position of secretary, has unworthily abused my confidence—"

Chevalier Casse-Cou suddenly stopped. He had yielded to his natural impetuosity in rushing on with this imprudent perusal, and he suddenly found that he would have done better to spare the feelings of his hearers. Martha could scarcely control a cry of pain and surprise, and her mother drew towards the bed with a frown upon her face, as though to reproach Cambremer for uncalled-for cruelty. However, Paul raised his head, and said in a firm tone : "Go on, sir, I beg of you ! It will be my just punishment !"

The chevalier still hesitated.

"Don't you see, sir," said the young man, bitterly, "that my dishonour is already known to those whom I—love ? They must know everything, and I beg you as a favour to read on to the end."

"I will do so," said Cambremer ; "the accusations of a robber don't amount to anything ; and when I have finished, I will undertake to answer them. Listen to the end of the infamous charge made by this man : 'This

person, who is but twenty years old, has been gambling since ever he came into my office. All my efforts to deter him from this fatal course were useless; and he has gone so far at last as to forge my signature at the bottom of an acknowledgment with the intention of appropriating a sum which one of my depositors had trusted to him. I reflected for a long time before taking so painful a course as to write to you, sir; for young Vernier was recommended to me by very respectable people, and I felt a great interest in him. But I am about to leave Paris, and am settling my affairs in view of going abroad, and transferring my business to a foreign country, and I should fail in my duty to society if I did not acquaint you with the conduct of a clerk who may try to find a situation elsewhere and make new victims. In the interest of public morality, I believe myself called upon to send you the forged receipt, so that you may take what measures you consider fit."

"And he has had the audacity to sign the letter, and give his Paris address," added Cambremer, shaking his fist at the absent scoundrel.

"Here is the forgery," said Paul Vernier, holding out the acknowledgment which lay upon the bed.

"Give it to me, so that I may throw it in the fire!" exclaimed Cassonade, who liked strong measures at all times.

"No," said the young man, who had turned as pale as death; "I beg of Monsieur Francis to keep it till I have expiated my fault. And now," he added, walking towards the door, "I am going away."

"Where are you going, my poor boy?" exclaimed Cambremer.

"To enlist. Volunteers are wanted for Algeria, and I am sure of being enrolled at once."

"Remain where you are. I desire you to do so."

Paul sadly shook his head, and placed his hand upon the door-knob. He wished to go out without looking back, for he felt sure that if his eyes met those of Martha, he would not have the courage to depart, although the thought of prolonging his humiliation was odious to him.

However, while he was trying to open the door, Baïa ran towards him, and put her little arms around him, rising on tiptoe to reach up to his neck. At the same time, she talked to him with incredible rapidity in her childish voice, which was like the warbling of a bird. Paul struggled bravely, but he had not the heart to resist such an attack, and big tears filled his eyes.

A scene in dumb-show was in the meantime going on behind him. Martha, as red as a rose, was looking down and leaning upon her mother's shoulder, trembling all over.

The poor girl was suffering the most cruel torture that a young heart can feel, and Madame Mongis also was experiencing a fierce mental struggle. Baïa's affectionate intervention put an end to her uncertainty. She looked upon the child as a second daughter, and it seemed to her that Heaven had inspired the little girl to oppose Paul's departure. So she took Martha by the hand and led her up to the young man, without saying a word.

"Monsieur Vernier," she said to him, seriously, "your mother, if she were here, would forgive you; it is in her name that I beg of you not to leave us."

Paul was so much affected that he leaned against the wall to keep himself from falling. He had, moreover, understood the entreaty, or rather the confession, in the eyes of the girl he loved. He was conquered, and he went back and seated himself by the bed.

"Faults can always be repaired, my friend," said Cambremer, "and

you have suffered enough for this one. We must burn this paper," he added, handing the receipt to Cassonade, who lost no time in throwing it into the fire.

Baïa had followed her young friend, and climbed upon the bed to embrace Francis once more. However, instead of throwing her arms about him with her usual impulsiveness, she took hold of a card which had not yet been examined, and which did not look like the other papers.

It was a piece of red pasteboard, cut in a triangular shape, and having a hole at one end, through which a bit of ribbon had been passed. It was easy to see that it was meant to be worn externally, like the tickets which people going to the races suspend from their button-holes so jauntily when they reach the Bois de Boulogne.

Cambremer, who was sure that the card was a signal of the gang, now attempted to take it from Baïa, but the little girl ran away from him. She slipped down to the floor, and began to walk gravely up and down, holding the card to the left side of her breast, and repeating two or three words in her unknown tongue.

Madame Mongis could scarcely induce her to give up the talisman which evidently reminded her of something connected with her past life. However, she had hardly glanced at it, before she uttered an exclamation of discouragement.

The card was covered with Arabic characters, and the only comprehensible thing about it was a yellow crescent on a red ground.

Cambremer, to whom the widow passed it, vainly turned it round; he could not see anything but this Oriental emblem surrounded with incomprehensible words. "My old friend Dillenius will read this to us," said he; "but even without him I know that this is a precious clue."

"Let us thank God for having saved you," said Madame Mongis, "but let us also thank Him for having induced that scoundrel to relinquish the idea of persecuting our dear Baïa. We can live at last without trembling for her every moment."

"Without trembling!" repeated Chevalier Casse-Cou; "then you don't understand Bousenna's letter to his accomplice?"

"But the man is dead, and his master has left Paris."

"How do you know that he won't return? Even should he go, as he says, to the country whence he came, don't you see that he means to deprive Baïa of her fortune, and that the forged papers are all in readiness? Do you think that I, Francis Cambremer, will suffer that to be effected? And don't you realise that Paul also is threatened?" continued Cambremer. "Bousenna does not explain himself clearly on the point, but it is evident that the persecutions from which Paul has suffered had a purpose, and I am beginning to realise what it is."

"My mother could tell you all about our former relations with Monsieur Bousenna," said Paul. And he timidly added: "I have written to tell her that I am no longer in his office, and I have spoken of my—my wishes."

Martha thought she knew what wishes these were, for she cast down her eyes.

"I will write also," said the chevalier, "and, if need be, I will go with you to Saint Omer, my dear Paul. We must not go to Brittany till we know everything."

"What! do you still wish to go to Brittany?" exclaimed Madame Mongis.

Cambremer was about to reply, when the sound of a vehicle driving up and stopping at the door of the house attracted his attention.

"Go and see who it is, my friend," said he to Paul. "Perhaps it is some one from police head-quarters to tell us about Monsieur Gévaudan."

In trying situations, sounds from without are apt to be listened to by those who are troubled and embarrassed. Paul Vernier had not recovered his self-possession ever since he had been forced to confess his transgression before the person from whom he most desired to hide it, and he was only too glad that attention should be called away from him.

Cambremer did not need to ask him twice to go to the window. He ran to it, thinking, like his friend, that news had probably come from police head-quarters. In the Rue Férou anything was an event, and the natives even went to their doors to see a Savoyard with a live marmot. The windows were now filled with people gazing at the thrilling spectacle of a cab stopping at Chevalier Casse-Cou's door.

"Well!" called out the impatient invalid.

"It is a cab!" said Paul, leaning out of the window. "There are trunks and parcels on it."

"The commercial traveller on the third floor has come back, then," said Cassonade.

"Well, we shall have no news to-day, then!" sighed Cambremer. "I have a great mind to send you to the commissary on the Ile Saint Louis, for the punchinello must have been questioned, and—"

"Great Heavens!"

This exclamation from Paul Vernier curtailed what Chevalier Casse-Cou had been about to say, and his amazement was great on seeing his young charge rush from the window to the door and dart into the hall.

"He is going out of his mind! So much for being in love," said the squire, in a low tone, for he remembered that he himself had once been in love with Pétronille.

Martha and her mother looked at one another with some anxiety. Baïa had gone towards them, and was questioning them with her eyes. As for Morillon, he was beginning to think himself in the way amid this private confabulation, and was quietly endeavouring to slip off. The delay lasted a few moments, during which Cambremer could not remain still, but kept telling those near him to go to the door and find out what had happened. Cassonade was about to obey when the door opened and Paul came in leading a lady dressed in mourning.

"My mother, sir," said the young man, in an agitated tone.

If the worthy chevalier had been able to rise, he would certainly have embraced Madame Vernier, but he was obliged to content himself with a few words of welcome, which proved his delight at seeing her.

"My son's letter reached me yesterday, sir," said Paul's mother, "and I would not delay a day in thanking you for what you have done for him."

"I, madame?" said Cambremer, wondering how far the confidential communications of his young friend had gone, "I have very little claim on your gratitude. It is he, on the contrary, who has shown very great devotion to me, and—"

"I know all, my dear Monsieur Francis," said Madame Vernier, "and I also know that there are others here whom I ought to thank."

Her eyes met those of Martha, whom she had been gazing at with kindly curiosity from the moment she had entered the room.

The young girl blushed deeply, and her mother, seeing this, came to her.

help. She held out her hand affectionately to Madame Vernier, made her sit down, and said to her in a tone in which her motherly feelings were evident. "We almost expected you, dear madame, and had you not come, we should have gone to you. Our common misfortunes bind us together, and would have excused our taking that liberty."

"And I looked for your visit," replied Madame Vernier, with a smile, "for Paul had promised me to bring you to La Roche, but I could not wait. His last letter spoke of such strange events—"

At this moment these introductory words were interrupted by Pierre Morillon, who for a moment past had been standing in an attitude of hesitation. "Don't you remember me, madame?" said he, in a timid tone.

And as Madame Vernier looked at him with surprise, he added, "I am Pierre, the son of the miller at Abancourt. I used to take care of the horses in the time of the late Monsieur Vernier."

"Yes, yes; you married that good Jacqueline of ours."

"I did. Ah! she'll be glad to see you again."

"This fine fellow has done us a great service," said Cambremer, "and we owe our knowing him to Paul."

"He and his wife can return to us whenever they like," replied Madame Vernier; "but I cannot tell you how I felt when I heard that you, sir—you, who had saved my son, had fallen into the hands of a scoundrel who—Ah! that man has sworn to ruin all who are dear to me!" added the widow, in a lower tone.

"You know him, then?" said Chevalier Casse-Cou.

"Only too well; and to the sorrow of all who belong to me!"

There was a silence. No one ventured to ask for an explanation which all were anxious to hear, and the uncertainty would have been prolonged had not Madame Vernier made up her mind to speak. Her face expressed a combination of mildness and firmness, and indicated her true character; her eyes, though soft, told of such resolution as would hold out against anything.

"I know that I am in the midst of true friends," said she, looking round with a glance full of feeling; "and I also know that we are all interested in unmasking and subduing our common enemy, without the loss of a day or even of an hour."

"That scoundrel Bousenna!" muttered Cambremer.

"Yes, he; and I beg of you to let me begin by telling you how I was led to confide my son to him. When I have justified myself as a mother, I will speak as a friend to friends," added Madame Vernier, smiling.

Martha and her lover exchanged a sympathetic glance.

"That man," resumed the widow, "met my husband on one of his trips to Paris. Their connection at first was simply neighbourly, for they happened to stay at the same hotel, and met on 'Change. Monsieur Bousenna then began to speculate, and induced Monsieur Vernier to do the same, and they speedily became intimate."

"What business did he then pretend to be doing, and where did he come from?"

"He said that he had large orders from foreign governments, and that he lived sometimes in Spain, sometimes in Turkey, England, or France, according to the requirements of his business. He never said where he was born, but my husband thought him to be a Levantine Jew."

"More likely from Algiers or Morocco."

"I have never known exactly; but from the moment that he first came to

the country-house where we were living, Monsieur Bousenna filled me with unconquerable aversion. I had a presentiment that he would ruin us, and I was right. After six years of speculations, the nature of which I do not know, our affairs became embarrassed. My husband was then at the head of a large commission business, which he had to give up, besides sacrificing almost all that we had in the world."

"His honest partner robbed him," said Cambremer, bitterly.

"I have always thought so, although my husband never seemed to suspect it. But I must come to the final catastrophe. We had an estate which was mine, and which we had succeeded in saving from the disaster. My husband went to Paris for a last trip to try to get some money which was due to him paid. He returned to La Roche very ill, but very well satisfied. He had, he told me, realized a considerable sum which he had left on deposit with his friend Bousenna."

"Yes," muttered the chevalier; "and he has it yet, and it is in order to keep it that he has endeavoured to get rid of your son."

"My husband," resumed Madame Vernier, "intended to go back to Paris during the following week to secure it, but he took to his bed on the day after his return, and three days later died of a mysterious illness."

The poor widow's voice broke as she uttered these last words, which recalled cruel grief.

Cambremer wished to ask her what had been the symptoms of M. Vernier's case, for he greatly suspected the black pin of having played a part in this sudden death; but he did not like to speak when he saw that the widow's grief was as fresh as though her bereavement had been a recent one.

"I wrote to Monsieur Bousenna," said Madame Vernier, "to tell him of my husband's death, and ask him to send me the sum which he had spoken of. He replied with numerous protestations of friendship, but declared that he had no money whatever belonging to us."

"Do you remember ever hearing Monsieur Vernier speak of Monsieur Bousenna's family?"

"He often told me that the man had a brother, that the brother was dead, and that he had left a wife and daughter who lived in a château in the country."

"A little daughter?" exclaimed Madame Mongis, who was holding Baïa on her knees.

"My husband also told me," resumed Madame Vernier, "that Monsieur Bousenna had quarrelled with his brother; that the latter had been very rich, and that he had not always lived in France."

"Did he tell you where the château was, madame?" asked Cambremer.

"My recollections are not very clear on that point. It seems to me that it was in the west, in La Vendée or Brittany."

"Did you ever see Monsieur Bousenna's sister-in-law or niece?"

"No; but I believe that my husband knew them. He once accompanied his friend on a trip to the country. I remember that this was but a short time before his death. He said something about it when he returned to La Roche, and, indeed, during his last hours he uttered a strange name several times, a feminine name, I believe—"

"Was it Baïa?" asked Madame Mongis.

"Yes, yes; that was it."

"We know everything now!" exclaimed Cambremer; "and I promise you that we will recover your son's fortune."

"Heaven help you, sir!" replied the widow, shaking her head with a doubtful air. "I don't ask so much; but I wish to save Paul from this man's clutches, and I must now tell you how I came to confide my son to him."

Chevalier Casse-Cou would not have ventured to ask so much; but, since Madame Vernier had begun to speak, he had more than once wondered why so tender a mother had been so reckless as to part with her son under such circumstances.

"Paul had just left college," continued Madame Vernier; "and the idleness of a little country town was likely to be dangerous to him. I thought of some pursuit that would be of service to him; but, after I became a widow, I had broken off all social relations, and I did not know to whom to apply to recommend an unknown young man. I was hesitating, when one morning I received a letter from Monsieur Bousenna."

"You may be sure, madame, that he had spics at St. Omer, and that he knew perfectly well that you were thus perplexed."

"I am tempted to believe it, for he could not have chosen a better time to write to me."

"What did he say to you?"

"He began by apologizing for his long silence, saying that he had been obliged for several years to travel about on account of business. He told me at the same time that he meant to settle permanently in France, and assured me that his sincerest wish was to help the son of a friend whom he so greatly regretted."

"The miserable hypocrite!" muttered Cambremer.

"Can you understand? He offered Paul a situation with suitable pay, and promised to watch over him like a father. I thought him sincere, and at the end of last year, after hesitating for a long time, I made up my mind to part with the child to whom I had devoted my life."

At this part of the story Paul could not restrain himself, but ran to his mother, threw himself into her arms and covered her with kisses. Those present were almost as much moved as he was, and tears came into their eyes.

"We know the rest, madame," said Cambremer, "we know the shameful traps into which this monster led your son. Paul was fortunate enough to escape, and I hope that we have entered upon a new phase in our struggle with that scoundrel. Will you help us to conquer him?"

"To conquer him?" repeated the widow, somewhat surprised by this solemn but startling proposition.

"Yes; he has gone to Brittany, and in a week, he perhaps will have left France, taking with him your son's fortune and that of this child."

The chevalier pointed to Baïa, whose big startled eyes were taking in the whole scene.

"He must not set sail and go away to his native land of robbers, and peacefully enjoy the fruit of his crimes. For my part, I have made up my mind to follow him to the end of the earth, if need be. I rely upon my friends to stand by me in this last attempt, and I ask you to allow Paul to go with me to Morbihan."

"I will not only let him go, but I will go with him."

"We will all go!" exclaimed Martha and her mother, in one breath.

Paul Vernier said nothing. He was too much agitated to speak; but he gave a start of joy at the thought of being able to travel in company with the young girl.

Cassonade alone refrained from evincing any enthusiasm. The sagacious squire thought that his master ought to have learnt to keep quiet, and he was all for building a golden bridge for the flying enemy. This was the time, or never, to apply the old saying, as M. Bousenna had given up his persecutions, and only asked to be let alone.

"I should think the best thing to do would be to let that fellow go and get hanged elsewhere," timidly remarked Pétronille's husband.

"What! would you give up the pursuit at the very moment when we have proof against the rascal?"

"My opinion is, that we cannot do much to him. Let us admit that we may catch him down there. However, he will be on his own ground, and it is not a pleasant one if all they say is true. Remember all the tricks that he has played us here; he could do worse in the woods and fields."

"Who says that we need run after him through the country?" interrupted Cambremer, petulantly. "Did you not hear what he says in his letter to Pavard, about a notary whom he is to see on the 12th of March? We shall find the clue to all these mysteries at Vannes."

"We must find out before we go whether the whole gang has really left Paris, and by-and-by I will call on the commissary on the Ile Saint Louis."

The noise of a sharp ring at the bell silenced him. Everybody exchanged glances, for it was not improbable that some news had been sent from the Prefecture of Police. Cassonade rose up to open the door, and brought in the official whom he had seen at the police-station near the Vendanges de Bourgogne. Cambremer just had time to conceal the contents of the pocket-book, which were spread upon the bed, and he signed to his friends to say nothing about him. He was glad to have some news through the police, but he did not care to tell them any. The official remembered the illness of the night before, and how Cambremer had come so near dying on the camp-bedstead, so he began by asking after his health. The patient assured him that he was quite well, but felt anxious to hear what the news was.

"Has anything been learnt through the punchinello and the fish-wife?" he asked.

"Nothing whatever," replied the official. "But the man has induced two persons to come forward to answer for him, persons who live in the neighbourhood of his abode, and who believe him to be a very respectable man; as for the woman, there is nothing against her, unless it be that she lives in the lodging-house where this Bousenna had his accomplices, but that is not sufficient proof to keep her in prison, and we shall be obliged to let them both go and watch them afterwards."

"How do you explain the red flower!" asked Cambremer, in an ironical tone, for he had little faith in police examinations.

"Well enough," answered the peace-officer; "that man Bousenna knew through the old woman called Mother Hippolyte, who is his tool, that the fringe-maker, who lives with her, was going to the ball on Shrove-Tuesday night. He even knew what she was going to wear—and her admirer as well—and he made use of this information to entrap you."

"But it was Monsieur Gévaudan who wrote to me."

"It is precisely the same thing," replied the official, with a smile. "I have just come from the Rue de la Lune where I was present at a perquisition ordered by the chief of the detective police and now all doubts are removed."

"Then Gévaudan is an accomplice of Bousenna's?"

"Better still: Gévaudan and Bousenna are one and the same person."

"That's impossible!"

"No; it is quite true. We found all the disguises, wigs, and false beards which the man made use of, and we discovered something else which was still more curious."

"What is that?"

"The secret passage which leads from the second-floor where the banker's office was, to the third-floor, where the agent of the Rue de la Lune gave his consultations. There is a skilfully devised staircase in the wall."

"Ah! I understand everything now," muttered Cambremer.

"Yes! the rascal!" growled Cassonade: "and to think that Pétronille had so much confidence in this man!"

"All this will be more fully explained to you, sir, at headquarters," added the official, bowing, and making ready to take leave. "My errand to-day is to ask you to go there as soon as you are able, and to request you to abstain from doing anything further at present. The entire gang has now left Paris; we are sure of that, and we need but a couple of weeks to track them to the country."

"In a couple of weeks," exclaimed Chevalier Casse-Cou, as soon as the visitor had turned upon his heel, "in a couple of weeks Bousenna will be arrested or I shall be dead!"

IX.

THE LAST OF THE PORSPODERS.

VANNES, the chief town of that part of Brittany known as the department of Morbihan, is a locality which geographical dictionaries and guide books describe as "a pretty little place, very dirty, and very badly built."

When the cathedral and the Tour du Connétable have been looked at—this last is an old wreck of a castle that once belonged to the Dukes of Brittany, and when the visitor has taken a walk along the avenue bordering the river, almost all that there is in the place to see has been seen, and there is no resource left one but to admire the museum and the prefect's office. It is true that the suburbs are worth looking at, and that archæological tourists have their choice between the druidical stones at Carnac and the keep of Elven, built on the return from the Crusade by a castellan who was fond of Oriental architecture. However, the place is far from gay, and people from Paris who go to Morbihan are bound to feel bored, unless serious interests detain them there.

Such was, fortunately, the case with Cambremer and his friends of both sexes. They arrived by coach in the evening, after a four days' journey, and installed themselves at a little inn near the port, called the "Chasse Marée."

Chevalier Casse-Cou, being a native of Saint Malo, had formerly visited the whole coast of the Breton peninsula, and was acquainted with an old tar at Vannes, who had sailed under his father's orders, and who had since opened this inn, which was but a fourth-class one. The Chasse Marée, indeed, was not mentioned in the guide-books of the day, and was only frequented by coasters and sardine-fishers. The spot was well suited to

Cambremer for this reason, for he did not wish to attract any attention. He had written from Paris to old Leguern to keep half a dozen rooms for his party at his house. The old "top-man" had the greatest respect for his whilom commander's son, and, in order the better to receive him, had sent off all his old lodgers.

When the Parisians arrived, they found the inn free from garret to cellar, and they took possession of their quarters quietly and without exciting the least curiosity on the part of the idlers of the place. The house stood quite at the end of the promenade, or as we in England should say, "The Parade," at fully a mile from the centre of the town, and as the newcomers had arrived at five in the morning, their coming had been almost unnoticed.

The two widows, Martha, and little Baïa, occupied the rooms on the first floor; while Cambremer, Paul, and the faithful Cassonade, took the second floor, that is to say, that immediately beneath the roof, for the Chasse Marée Inn was by no means large.

It was a small house, with whitewashed walls and green shutters, and looked pleasant, just like a country-house, such as is seen in Provence.

Old Leguern had sailed about a great deal in the Mediterranean, and his tastes were gay. A little kitchen-garden extended behind the inn, which looked upon the quay. Sloops, luggers, and various fishing-crafts were moored in the port, for the River Vannes, like almost all the water-courses in Brittany, was but a prolongation of the ocean; and, twice a day, the tide made it an arm of the sea.

The novel sight charmed the caravan from the Rue Férou. Martha, especially, who had never been out of Paris, never tired of the bustle and stir of the little port, and passed almost all day at the window. Baïa, on the contrary, showed no surprise, and it was evident that she had seen ships, sailors and rigging before. The masculine portion of the party consisted of Paul, who, as a child, had played upon the beach at Boulogne, Cassonade, who was never surprised at anything, and Cambremer, for whom the sea had no secrets. Moreover, the men were thinking of something else besides the maritime landscape before their eyes. Chevalier Casse-Cou had given due instructions to everybody. It had been agreed that the ladies should only take short walks, in order not to be noticed by the inhabitants of the place, and that Paul should always go with them, while Cassonade alone accompanied his master upon such excursions as might be necessary.

Cambremer had kept the main direction of the undertaking to himself, and had naturally begun by looking out for information. This was a somewhat delicate matter. It was difficult to obtain any clue without divulging the secret of the voyage of discovery, and he thought it best to begin by talking to the innkeeper, whom he had taken into his confidence.

On the morning of the second day, the chevalier was seated upon a stone bench near the door of the house, side by side with old Leguern. The innkeeper was a man between fifty and sixty, attired like an old tar, and having a weather-beaten face, such as might have been expected after so much travel to the four corners of the globe. His face was not without expression, however, and his grey eyes possessed a youthful keenness.

He was smoking a pipe so short that it looked as though it must burn his lips, and from time to time he caressed a large dog with a curly back, which a friend had brought him from Newfoundland.

The tide was low, and upon the deserted quay, only a sea-gull with

clipped wings was hopping about among some empty casks. Inside the inn two active servants were busy preparing the breakfast under the direction of Madame Yvonne, a fresh and rosy matron, whom old Leguern had married in 1814, on his return from a lucrative voyage in the Indian seas.

The place and hour were well suited to a confidential chat, and the conversation began by the report of a commission which the innkeeper had undertaken to attend to on the evening before.

"Upon my word, Monsieur Francis," said he, politely, removing his pipe from his mouth, "I think that if you came here to find the party whose passport you handed me yesterday you'll find it a hard matter to set your hand upon him."

"Didn't they know anything about him at the mayor's office?"

"Worse than that. The clerk looked over all his registers, and could not find the name. It seems, with all respect to you, that the passport is a forged one."

"I thought so!" exclaimed Cambremer.

"I didn't, and if I had not been known to be an honest man here at Vannes, I might have got into trouble with that paper."

"So you might!" stammered the chevalier, quite confused at having overlooked this unpleasant possibility.

"Yes; the little hunchback who keeps the books wanted to call the police, but I spoke to the assistant, who is an old cruiser, and everything was settled."

"What did you say to him?"

"That the passport had been forgotten by a Parisian who had left the inn without paying me. There was no danger that I'd tell him that it concerned you."

"My good old Leguern," said Cambremer, with earnestness, "you steered like a true sailor."

"Oh! Monsieur Francis, you needn't thank me. I would do a good deal more than that for my old commander's son."

"I know that you were devoted to my poor father, and I am aware that I can rely upon you, but I do not wish you to think that I am mixed up with anything disreputable."

"You! a Cambremer? No danger! I would sooner believe that the stones at Carnac dance a jig on the sand hills."

"I came here to repair a great piece of injustice, and I hope that you will help me to restore an inheritance to a poor child who has been robbed by scoundrels."

"Is it that little girl who has such bright eyes?"

"Yes, my man; and I am sure that you would be as fond of her as I am if you only knew her."

"I am fond of her now, if only on account of her pretty eyes. I haven't seen such eyes as those since I was last in the Levant."

"That is where she came from, to the best of my belief; and yet she has lived in Brittany, and that is the very thing that I want to question you about."

"Me? I never saw her before, and you won't find anybody with such a face as that from Quimper to Savenay."

"Do you know of any place called Suscinio?" demanded Cambremer, abruptly.

"Of course, I do; it is a little village not far from the coast, over there

by Sarzeau, and that's a market-town. There's an old château there which is all in ruins, but big enough to put a threemaster inside of it easily."

"Is there anybody living there?"

"Oh! the place is only tenanted by bats and screech-owls. As for the people who built it, they've been dead for ages."

"Well, did you ever hear of the Chênaie Etêtée?"

"No, I never did; but it may be over that way, and I'll ask the first fellow from Sarzeau or Saint Gildas that I come upon, at market to-morrow."

"Good! Now, is there any family in this part of the country named Porspoder?"

Old Leguern jumped up from his seat, and, with an air of utter astonishment, exclaimed: "Porspoder? Did you say Porspoder?"

"I did," replied Cambremer, greatly astonished by the effect produced upon the old sailor by this name. "What is there so strange in that?"

"Well, when I hear the name of Porspoder mentioned, it carries me back to times which are long past and gone, but which I shall never forget."

"Tell me all about it, Leguern; I like stories."

"I'm sure that there's no one else but me about here who knows this story; there's nobody now whom it concerns."

"How's that?"

"The last of the Porspoders is dead, and when he was alive, he did not often come here."

"But you knew him, my man?"

"I should say that I did. But for him, I shouldn't be here smoking this pipe."

"Listen to me, old fellow," said Cambremer, gravely; "I don't ask these questions for curiosity's sake. I have a great interest in knowing who the family are whose name I have just mentioned, and I want you to tell me all that you know about them."

The old sailor scratched his head, and made no haste to reply. "I ask you, for my father's sake, to tell me!" resumed the chevalier.

"Well," exclaimed Leguern, "your father saved my life, too, and I can very well do his son this favour; and all the more as it won't hurt poor Monsieur Mériadec, as he is dead and gone."

"Who may Mériadec be?"

"That was the name given to the heir of the Porspoders when he was baptized at Saint Pol de Léon, during the year before the great Revolution. At that time nobody in all Léon was richer than the old marquis."

"The family was noble and influential, it seems?"

"They had more estates than they could count, and they went to court at Versailles; but when things began to be so bad for the nobility—the 'have-beens,' as people used to say then—the marquis took his wife and son over to England, and then came back to fight in La Vendée."

"Was he killed?"

"He was unfortunately made prisoner at Quiberon, and the blues shot him, with the others, at Auray. My father told me the story many a time, for I was then a middy on board the *Clorinde*, which was blockaded in the roads of Toulon."

"What became of the boy?"

"Young Mériadec stayed on in London, and did not set foot in Brittany till peace was made. His mother died over there, and when he came back

from the emigration, all his estates had been sold as property of the state. All he had left him was an old ruin that nobody had cared to buy, and a bit of land that would not have kept a cow."

"I suppose he went to Paris to claim his rights, as many others did?"

"Bah! he did not care anything about either rights or about his title of marquis! I must tell you that over there among the English he had taken to the sea. It was in his blood. His great-grandfather had been a naval officer in India, under Admiral Suffren, and he had also an uncle who was killed on board the *Belle Poule*, in the American war."

"True; I remember seeing the name in a history of our navy."

"Well, the boy had grown to be a fine, handsome fellow of twenty-four by the year 1814, and could take command of a three-master; for he had already been round the world two or three times. That is why he quietly went off to the East, being engaged as a captain for a long cruise, and six months after the return of the Bourbons, he was sailing about for a ship-owner at Nantes."

"Was it then that you came across him?"

"Exactly; on board the '*Marie-Jeanne*,' on which I embarked as boat-swain; and, indeed, I made five trips with him; and on my last voyage he saved me from drinking too large a glass of water."

"Do you mean that he saved you in a shipwreck?"

"No; but once just as we were entering the Straits of Gibraltar, I fell into the sea in a gale, and he jumped into the water to fish me out. It seems like nothing, but with the blast that we had that day, he risked his life and his ship, too, and all for an old sailor like me. Not many captains would have done as much!"

"No; he was evidently a brave, good man," murmured Cambremer, thoughtfully.

The chevalier did not see how this story could be connected with that of M. Bousenna, but he did not doubt but what the Porspoder in question was the man whose name appeared in the papers in the pocket-book picked up by Morillon.

"I'm telling you all this," said old Leguern, "to show you that I would have let myself be cut in two for Captain Mériadec; and, indeed, I have never been able to get over his coming to such a bad end."

"Bad end!" said Chevalier Casse-Cou; "was he lost at sea?"

"If he had died a sailor's death," said the old tar, shaking his head, "I should not have been so sorry!"

"Was he killed in a duel, or—or murdered?"

"It was never rightly known. But, although I don't like to talk about it, I'll tell you the whole story."

Cambremer was so attentive now that he did not ask any more questions, for fear of interrupting the narrative.

"I must tell you," resumed Leguern, "that the '*Marie-Jeanne*' had been equipped to trade along the coast of Africa, from Tangiers to Senegal. The trade was good, but the coast was bad. There was a deal of money to make with gums and ivories, but whenever we neared shore we were in danger of our lives. Still, this did not prevent the captain from anchoring at three cables' length from an anchorage place called the Rabat, and remaining there two weeks at a time. At the third voyage I began to suspect something."

"And you found out—"

"I found out something that I had suspected before. The captain was

in love with a woman of that part, a native of Morocco, and, in order to see her, he exposed himself every night to having his throat cut."

Chevalier Casse-Cou was now so deeply interested that he turned quite pale.

"As you may well imagine," resumed Leguern, "it didn't at all suit me to see the last of the Porspoders risking danger like that just for the sake of a Mahomedan, and, as I could speak out with him, I did not hesitate to do so. Bah! I might as well have preached a sermon to the capstan."

"He loved her," said Cambremer, in a low tone.

"As to that, he did, and so well, too, that one night he brought his princess with him in the long-boat."

"You saw her, then?"

"Not then, for she wore a veil which hid her face, as is the custom in Morocco; but I had a good look at her on the day when I was one of the guests at the wedding."

"Then he married her?"

"Yes; at Cadiz, in presence of the French consul; and if you had only seen how many people came to look at the beautiful Mauresque! And yet beautiful women are not scarce in those parts. Spanish women are number one you know, especially those of Cadiz. But, dash it, that Mauresque was a beauty, and if I had not married Yvonne, I think that I should have gone back again to Morocco to find one like her!"

Chevalier Casse-Cou could not help smiling at this simple avowal of the old sailor's admiration, however Leguern sadly resumed: "If Monsieur Mériadec had not brought anybody with him but the black-eyed lady, I think that he might have been happy with her all the same. He had learned to speak the Arabic tongue, and as she had promised him to become a Christian, they were as happy as though he had taken some young lady from Lorient or Ploërmel for his wife. But, unfortunately, there was a brother."

"A brother!" exclaimed Cambremer, suddenly seized with the idea that he would find this new personage to be the man whom he had come to Brittany to look for.

"Yes; and a young slave-woman, besides; and those two creatures, the brother and the slave were; both of them, so wicked, so vile, that I do not know which was the worst. If Monsieur Mériadec had listened to me, he would have pitched them both into the Bay of Biscay. But the Moor had got round him so completely that he swore by him alone. The man, you see, wasn't a Bedouin, like the rest. He had practiced all sorts of trades, over there. He had travelled and traded everywhere, and spoke French as well as you or I. As for the female slave, she was as pretty as a angel, and as malicious as a monkey, and she did not love her poor mistress at all, I'm sure of it."

"That must be Yamina, the woman with the red flower," muttered Chevalier Casse-Cou to himself, in amazement at hearing so many coinciding statements.

"It is none the less certain," resumed the inkeeper, "that when we landed at Paimbœuf, the captain brought everybody along with him. He had made money in his travels, and had a handsome interest in his ship-owner's firm. Well, would you believe it, instead of buying a ship with his little fortune, and going out to sea for himself, he withdrew all his funds to go and live with his Moors in the old ruined chateau that belonged to him? A sailor, such as there were few even in the state fleet, to leave a

seafaring life at thirty and stupidly end his life on dry land ! Just fancy that ! Ah ! Monsieur Francis, I have never got over it ! ”

“ Then he died upon the estate where he went to live ? ”

“ Alas ! yes ; and just at the time when he had become rich. For the first few years after his marriage I continued to sail about, and I hadn't time to go to see him. I had heard that he had a little daughter, and that he would have been very happy if his brother-in-law had not given him trouble. But that good-for-nothing Moor squandered everything, according to what was said about the place. I said, at last : ‘ Some of these days the captain will send that fellow away, and I shall be able to go to see him without finding that villain there. ’ But it did not come about so soon. ”

Cambremer guessed that the catastrophe was approaching, and listened breathlessly.

“ On returning from a voyage in the southern seas, ” continued old Leguern, “ about six years ago, I heard that the property of the emigrants was to be restored to them, and that the Marquis de Porspoder would receive a million as his share. ”

“ A million ! ” muttered Chevalier Casse-Cou, “ more than enough to tempt that wretch Bouscenna ! ”

“ I do not know what person you are speaking of, but the truth is that a million is a very pretty sum. ”

“ And did Monsieur Mériadec receive it ? ”

“ Some say yes, others say no. ”

“ But it seems to me that such a fortune could not vanish without anything being known about it. ”

“ That depends upon circumstances. If the heir of the Porspoders could have received this châteaux and lands again, there would surely have been something known, for land and stone don't melt away ; but all that had been sold long before. It seems that the government was not willing to give back the national property, and made up for it by giving bits of paper to people. ”

“ What do you mean by that ? ”

“ I mean what I say. Titles, they call them. They give you a piece of paper about as big as your hand, and you go and get your money every six months from the receiver-general, an old fellow with a decoration, who has an office near the cathedral. ”

“ And the marquis received his indemnity in that way ? ”

“ Ah ! that's what I don't exactly know ; but it's very likely, for my captain went to Paris with his devil of a brother-in-law, and came back as happy as a king. ”

“ Then you saw him at the time ? ”

“ Excuse me, no ; if I had, I should know for certain, for Monsieur Mériadec liked me well enough not to keep the matter from me, and when we found ourselves over a big bowl of old Jamaica rum, he used to tell me all his business. But I arrived too late. ”

“ I do not understand very clearly, ” said Cambremer, who was beginning to regret that he had not known all this before leaving Paris.

“ You will see ; for I am going to tell you the whole story, and it's far from pleasant, let me mention ! ”

“ I am listening ; and I beg you, as a favour, not to leave anything out. ”

“ I was telling you just now that, on returning from Valparaíso, I heard that Monsieur Mériadec had just returned from the capital, and had

brought back money enough to buy the whole Lanvaux. It was said that the Moor had remained in Paris, and there were folks who pretended that there had been a difficulty between them, and that the porpoise would not come up on these shores again. This was my time to go and see my old captain, and I began to pack up my little valise, in view of taking a trip to his cabin."

"Where did he live?"

"Oh! not far from here, near Locmariaker. He had taken up his abode in an old building that some Porspoder or other had built in the olden time, and which he had partly rebuilt, for the best part of it was not tenatable."

"Wasn't there a tower and a moat?" asked Cambremer, eagerly, for he remembered the famous engraving.

"A tower? oh! I should think so, and moats like those of a fortress! It seems that the place sustained a siege against the English, and that the first marquis was killed there. But when Monsieur Mériadec came there, all this was dilapidated, and it cost him a deal of money to repair it."

Chevalier Casse-Cou was no longer listening to the speaker. He was busy feeling in his coat for a large pocket-book in which he had placed all the papers relating to the great affair, and, among others, the engraving without a title, which he had mounted upon some linen just like a geographical chart.

Old Leguern looked at him with some surprise, but as soon as Cambremer spread the picture of the unknown castle before him, he exclaimed: "By Saint Anne of Auray! that is the exact picture of the château of Kerpenhir."

"Then this is the place where Monsieur de Porspoder lived with his wife and daughter?"

"Of course it is; you see that great round tower, at the end of the house on the right?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is all that remains of the old château, with the terrace and the moat full of water in front of it. The rest was rebuilt by Monsieur Mériadec, but not as it is here."

"How can you tell it then?" asked Cambremer, who was afraid lest the old tar might have made a mistake.

"Oh! there is nothing like it in the whole country round about," responded Leguern, "and, besides, there's the wood, full of beech-trees, which is still there, and the fairy-stones there on the left, and the bell-turret, in front, that I had forgotten! Monsieur Mériadec wished to preserve that, and he had a great deal of trouble about it when the masons were building the under-pinning on the same floor."

"Then he lived in the left wing with his family?"

"In the left wing? Upon my word, I couldn't tell you," replied the old tar, who was not good at architectural terms. "All that I know is, that, excepting the big tower which no one had been able to enter for a long, long time, my old captain and his people occupied the whole building."

"Go on with your story," said Cambremer, eager to hear the end.

"Where was I? Ah! I remember. One morning, then, I kissed Yvonne, and told her not to expect me in the evening, for I was sure that Monsieur Mériadec would keep me for two or three days. I started with old Cadic's sloop. We went down the river, and there was a smart breeze from the north-east. At twelve precisely we anchored in the creek near Kerpenhir."

"Did Monsieur de Porspoder expect you?"

"No; I wished to surprise him, and it was I who was surprised, as you will see. I left old Cadic on the shore, and went quietly over the sand-hills. I must tell you that there's a lake before you come to the château, and you have to walk round it. While I was going along the banks, smoking my pipe, what did I see but a body floating upon the water!"

"It was he?"

"Ah! I had no trouble in recognising him, not I! with his long hair, that floated among the reeds, and his naval coat which he always wore. As you may suppose, I felt pretty badly when I brought him ashore, and saw my poor captain drowned in a handful of water, not deep enough for me to have steered a long-boat in it—and to think that he had doubled Cape Horn three times!"

"But had he committed suicide?"

"You ask me to tell you what no one has ever been able to find out: but wait for the end of the story. You may be sure that I ran as fast as I could to Kerpenhir, to alarm the people indoors. But there was not a creature there!"

"What! not his wife nor daughter?"

"Everybody had gone; and two rascals, whom the Moor had brought from Paris, as servants, had disappeared also. I ran as fast as I could to the village, but no one could tell me anything. Monsieur Mériadec had returned from Paris three days previously, and on the evening before he had gone to Vannes with his whole family. It would seem that during the night he had returned alone to the château, and had accidentally fallen into the lake."

"But wasn't his body examined to see if there were any wounds upon it?"

"There wasn't one; and yet, you see, the death was very mysterious, for Monsieur Mériadec swam like a fish, and the lake was small and by no means deep. There came a judge from Vannes with a doctor, a clerk, and two policemen, and all sorts of inquiries took place; but there was no finding out anything, and my poor captain had to be buried without any one knowing exactly what rascal had sent him to the other world."

"How is it that no trace of his family was found?"

"Oh! the public prosecutor received a letter from the brother-in-law, written from London, to say that his sister and niece had been obliged to go away, and would be back in a month's time."

"Were they never seen again?"

"Never. But he was seen."

"Whom do you mean by 'he'?"

"The Moor, of course."

"What!" exclaimed Cambremer, "you don't mean to say that he had the audacity to return here?"

"Yes, indeed. Monsieur Mériadec hadn't been dead a month when the scoundrel returned to Vannes, and went straight to the authorities."

"What did he say to them?"

"He told them a pack of stuff and, unfortunately, they ended by believing him."

"What could he say to explain so strange a death?"

"Ah! that's it; he is a fellow with such a wily tongue that Monsieur Allanic, the notary, told me that all the judges believed him, and that everything was straight. According to that scamp, Monsieur Mériadec

returned from Paris with the intention of leaving Brittany, and settling in the capital. His indemnity as an emigrant was paid, and, with an income of fifty thousand francs a year, in addition to all the money he had made, he could have cut a figure at court. He had taken away his wife, his daughter, and his servants, leaving the manor of Kerpenhir to harbour the swallows only. But he had to return, according to the Moor, to get some forgotten papers, and, as he was in a great hurry, he left Vannes in the evening, after putting his family into the diligence that was going to Paris, and promising to follow them in three days' time. However, the accident occurred that night."

"But that is an absurd story!" exclaimed Casse-Cou. "Besides, it must have been easy to find out whether it was true or not. For instance, inquiries might have been made at the coach-offices as to whether the family and servants really went away."

"It seems that places had been taken for Madame de Porspoder and her daughter, but as they were not known at Vannes, no one could tell whether it was really they who took the coach that day."

"But, as regards Monsieur Mériadec, they must have found the owner of the boat which took him over to his place?"

"No, but there was nothing surprising in that. My old captain had had a sloop built at Lorient which could sail its six knots an hour, and when he went to town or returned to Kerpenhir, he had no need of any one to sail it."

"Where was the sloop on the day after his death?"

"It was stranded upon the sand, in a little creek, some two or three yards from the lake."

Cambremer could say no more; and he asked no further questions. He saw that he was losing time, and that it would do no good to inquire further as to the occurrences that had baffled all the legal authorities long ago. The idea occurred to him to try another plan.

"All this is not absolutely impossible," he resumed, after some moments of silence; "but what became of Monsieur de Porspoder's fortune? His daughter must have inherited the million that he brought from Paris?"

"His daughter, when he was drowned, could not have been more than three years old, and the title to the income had been deposited with Monsieur Allanic, the family notary, the night before the departure for Paris. A question arose as to giving the guardianship to the mother until the little girl grew up; but the mother was in London with her child; at least, that is what the brother-in-law said."

"What was his name?" eagerly asked the chevalier.

"Upon my word, I never knew exactly what it was; he must have had a name such as would scare the devil to death, like all the Bedouins in his own country; but I believe that he had picked out some Christian patron-saint like Saint Joseph or Saint John."

"It must have been Joseph," muttered Cambremer, who remembered the man in the Rue de la Lune.

"Perhaps so; but what is certain is, that after arranging matters with the public prosecutor, he tried for two or three days to get Monsieur Allanic, the notary, to give him the title; but Monsieur Allanic is a good man, and he did not let the fellow get round him."

"What did the rascal do then?"

"He went away, saying that he was going to London to fetch his sister and niece, but, as you may suppose, none of them returned."

"Then the fortune has remained in the notary's hands?"

"Oh! you may be sure that he hasn't touched it, and with the interest up to this time, it must form a large sum."

Cambremer again began to reflect. All his doubts were cleared up, and he felt sure that the most fortunate chance imaginable had, at last, put him upon M. Bousenna's track. The murder at the Odéon was, evidently, only the epilogue of the crime committed on the border of the lake at Kerpenhir, and the culprit was now trying to accomplish his final execrable purpose. The papers found in his accomplice's pocket-book spoke of false certificates of death, which were to be produced, and of a great affair to be ended before the 12th of March. The fortune of the last of the Porspoders was the stake for which this odious game had been played, and to outstrip Bousenna, he, Casse-Cou, must needs make great haste.

"Where does the notary live?" he asked, abruptly.

"In the Rue des Chanoines, not far from Saint Patern's church, but to-day is Sunday, and Monsieur Allanic goes every Sunday to his farm at Plouharnel. You won't find him at his office till to-morrow morning."

"You must take me there, and you must say who I am; you will, won't you?"

"Of course I will, Monsieur Francis; and you will be well received for your father's sake, you may be sure of it. But are you thinking of buying any land about here?"

"I may do so," replied Cambremer, evasively.

"Well, you would do as well to take Kerpenhir, if only to rent it. At least, I should not have the sorrow of seeing my old captain's house fall into ruins."

"Hasn't the manor been occupied since Monsieur Mériadec's death?"

"Excuse me, yes. The Moor had no sooner gone to England, so he said, than a stranger came to hire Kerpenhir. Monsieur Allanic had the management of the affairs of the deceased Monsieur Mériadec. While awaiting the widow's return, he thought that he had better take advantage of this opportunity, and he made arrangements with the gentleman who rented it, first for six months, and then stayed on for six years."

"What kind of man was he, and what did he do while he was there?"

"Oh! he was thought to be a queer sort of fellow, and he did not look as though he was any too good. He was a man of forty or fifty, more or less, who never spoke to anyone, and never left the manor, except to buy some provisions at Locmariaker, and he must have had a very great appetite, for he ate enough for three."

"But he must have had some reason for coming here; he must have been fond of shooting or fishing?"

"I don't know; but what I do know is, that he was finally thought to be a sorcerer. The peasants about Kerpenhir used to say that he practised the black art in the big tower of the manor, that one, you see?" said old Leguern, putting his finger upon the engraving which had remained spread out upon Cambremer's knees.

"I thought you said that it was not habitable?"

"Monsieur Mériadec never set foot there; but it was good enough for a wizard. A light was often seen in the top part of the tower, and sometimes a woman all in white was seen to walk upon the platform in the moonlight. Some people said that they heard moaning and weeping at times."

"How long did all this last?"

"All the time that the foreigner remained at Korpenhir. Why! it was not six weeks ago that he went off one fine night without saying a word to anybody."

"Yes," exclaimed Cambremer, "it is all true! Bousenna's poor victim came to Paris in the early part of February, and her jailer must have left the manor with her. He was taking her to her master, as a lamb is led to the slaughter!"

Chevalier Casse-Cou was explaining the strange story, according to his preconceived ideas, but Leguern did not understand him.

"I don't know," said he, quietly, "what victims or what lamb you are talking about; but you must not believe all that the fellows round about the country say. They think that there are sorcerers and familiar spirits everywhere. But you remember asking me, when we began to talk, whether I knew where the Château of Suscinio was? Well, people say that a devil's sabbath is held there every night. However, as you may suppose, an old tar like me doesn't swallow such stuff as that; no, he doesn't!"

Cambremer was startled by this new clue, which related to a spot mentioned as the meeting-place in Bousenna's letter to the deceased Pavard. He was going to ask for more information about it when Martha appeared at the doorstep. She held Baïa by the hand, and the child ran to kiss her dear Francis.

"Leguern," exclaimed Chevalier Casse-Cou, raising the little girl in his arms, "thank Heaven for having watched over this child! She is the heiress of the Porspoders!"

X.

IN WHICH THE NOTARY-ROYAL COMES UPON THE SCENE OF ACTION.

M. ALLANIC—Yves-Conan-Patern—bore his singular Armorican name and Christian names without sinking under the burden.

Three generations of lawyers had successively occupied the old wooden house which reared its pointed gables half-way down the Rue des Chanoines. But under the reign of the previous notary of this race of lawyers, the office had black wood tables and horn ink-stands, whereas his successor had thought fit to sacrifice somewhat to the modern innovation called comfort.

M. Yves, whose ancestors had never left Rennes, had studied law in Paris, and his contemporaries declared that he had been known to dance very gracefully at the balls of the Grande-Chaumière. They even insinuated that this scion of a Breton stock had taken more share than was befitting in the liberal politics of the day. He was accused in the orthodox society of Vannes of having indulged in fisticuffs outside the Sorbonne to uphold the professors persecuted by the government.

His athletic frame and sanguine temperament gave some appearance of truth to these reports, but nowadays these youthful indiscretions were being lost sight of, and indeed M. Allanic had amply made up for them since his return to his native place. His old-fashioned integrity, his solid judgment as a lawyer, and his exceptional ardour in the exercise of his profession, were all placed at the service of his clients, rich and poor alike. His fame had gone beyond the frontier of the department, and more than one rich merchant of Nantes had confided a part of his interests to this model of legal officials.

The aristocracy of Morbihan had remained faithful to him because they liked him, and also because they knew all about him, and were in the habit of going to him; for M. Allanic's manners had not suffered by his sojourn in the Quartier Latin, and he still made a good show in the drawing-rooms of the Cathedral district, where the government was favourably looked upon. In the little world of peasants and fishermen, too, M. Yves was looked up to with great respect, and the lower orders called him a "good fellow" and a "first-rate sailor."

As for the poor, his proverbial charity was extended to them without regard to their nationality. From the "Cloarec" in rags, who went about singing Christmas carols in the Breton dialect at the doors, to the waif cast by some shipwreck upon the fatal shores of the Pointe de Gavre, or the peninsula of Rhuys, all were sure of finding a loaf of buckwheat bread, a jug of cider, and some woollen clothing at his house.

M. Allanic was, therefore, as popular as he had the right to be, and much liked by one and all. If he had lived a few years later he need not have resorted to any wire pulling to have secured a seat in the Chamber of Deputies.

However, this wise man had other views. A short time after his return from Paris, Yves had married a charming young girl, whose ancestors had formerly gone in great state to the court of the Dukes of Brittany. They had, unfortunately, been ruined in 1515 by the annexation of the duchy to France, and the charming Alliette de Renroiset had brought her husband as a dowry merely her black eyes, her delicate figure, her unalterable amiability, and an excellent education given her by the Ursulines at Pontivy. In fact, M. Allanic had made a love-match, and he did not regret it. His dear Alliette bore him two fine, healthy sons; the profession which he followed brought him in a great deal of money, and the gout, from which his grandparents had suffered, left him in peace, although he loved good cheer. The notary was a happy man in every sense of the word, and, what is still more rare, he deserved to be so.

When he returned on a Monday morning to take his place in his arm-chair, covered with green leather, in front of his mahogany desk with a cylinder top, after a pleasant Sunday spent with his family in his pretty home at Plouharnel, M. Allanic thought himself the most favoured of mortals, and he was right in so believing.

One Monday, in March, the happy notary was sitting in his office, on the floor of which there was a moquette carpet, while on the walls appeared a paper with a gilt pattern which was the admiration of the town. He had just removed the goatskin coat which he wore on Sundays and assumed the white tie and black costume belonging to his profession.

M. Allanic was not more than thirty-five, and was a fine specimen of the Armorican race. His broad and slightly stooping shoulders, his black eyes, and his thin face gave him a somewhat singular look at first sight; but the frank smile that played upon his thick red lips soon reassured his visitors. There was nothing that argued untruthfulness in his somewhat sensual features. Yves had made a hearty breakfast, and was smoking a most unlawful-like pipe while reading a letter that had just been brought to him.

This interesting occupation was interrupted by the arrival of his head clerk, who came in with a card which had been handed him by a visitor.

"Francis Cambremer," read M. Allanic. "I do not know him," he added to the clerk, who stood at the door with his pen behind his ear. "Who is the gentleman?"

"A Parisian, most likely; he is with Leguern, the old boatswain, you know; who keeps the Chasse Marée inn."

"Very good! He is perhaps a tenant that the good fellow is bringing me for Kerpenhir. That would be a good thing, now that we have an heir."

"Ah, yes! That letter that you are reading there; but you would do as well to make inquiries about it."

"I shall do so, Closmader; all our family have been careful not to draw up papers improperly, and I sha'n't give in my accounts unless I know what I am about, and unless all the proper documents are brought forward. Meanwhile, show the gentlemen in."

As he gave this order the notary put away his pipe, but not without a sigh of regret. This somewhat too well blackened comforter seemed to him out of place when about to attend to a professional duty. Old Leguern, who came as an introducer, entered the first, turning his waxed tarpaulin about in his hands and ushering in Cambremer, whose manner also evinced some embarrassment.

Chevalier Casse-Cou never hesitated when it was necessary to rush into peril, but the matter at hand was a different thing. To persuade a lawyer that the heiress of a great Breton family had been miraculously found at the corner of the Rue Férou was a very delicate matter, and Cambremer realised that the task he had undertaken was by no means easy of achievement.

"Monsieur Allanic," said the old tar, who was quite destitute of tact, "I bring you the son of my old commander, who owned the 'Moustique,' and we have come to talk to you about the daughter of my other captain, poor Monsieur Mériadec, now dead and gone."

The notary, in spite of his professional dignity, could not help shrugging his shoulders, as he sat in his office-chair, and, in fact, he looked at the stranger with somewhat ironical attention.

"My visit and its purpose must surprise you, sir," said Cambremer; "but if you will listen to me for a moment, I hope I shall be able to convince you that it has a very serious motive."

"I am quite ready to listen to you, sir," replied M. Allanic, courteously; "your name, which I did not remember at first, is honourably known in the French navy, and I feel flattered that my old friend Leguern should have brought you to see me."

"I heard, sir," resumed Chevalier Casse-Con, "that you had charge of the matters relating to Monsieur de Porspoder's property, and that is what I wish to speak of."

"I am at your orders, sir, so far as it does not interfere with my duties."

Although this reservation was so politely expressed, Cambremer concluded from it that he must be careful. "You were well acquainted with the last representative of the family which has so unfortunately died out?" he said. "I have been told so, at least."

"I was, indeed, sir; I may call myself his friend."

"Oh, as for that, Monsieur Mériadec had no better friend than you, sir?" exclaimed old Leguern, "and if he had only listened to me—"

"Will you allow me to ask you if you had any acquaintance with those who were always about him?" interrupted the chevalier.

"You allude to Madame de Porspoder and her daughter, I presume. Alas! yes; I knew them and loved them, as they well deserved, and I

hoped that some day we should meet again. But there was apparently a curse upon all who bore that name."

"What do you mean, sir?" asked Cambremer, with a start.

"I have just received news of the death of the mother and child," said M. Allanic, showing the letter which he had just laid upon his desk.

"What! has that man had the audacity to write to you?"

"What man are you speaking of?" said M. Allanic, quietly.

"The murderer of Monsieur de Porspoder, the odious assassin who wishes to seize upon the fortune of that unlucky family."

Chevalier Casse-Cou realised that he had too readily yielded to an angry impulse, for the notary at once assumed his coldest manner.

"I believe, sir," said he, after a short silence, "that you are accusing the brother-in-law of my poor friend Mériadec of a crime of which he was certainly suspected, but upon which the law long ago pronounced. It is a very serious thing to bring such charges, and you must allow me to ask why you meddle with this matter."

This little speech, although made in a very quiet tone, had the effect of inducing Cambremer to calm himself. He saw that his interference must have a reason, first of all, and that a government lawyer was not called upon to explain his client's affairs to the first comer.

"Well, sir," said he, attempting to restrain himself, "you know who I am, and I hope that my father's name is enough to warrant my respectability."

M. Allanic bowed politely, but waited for something more.

"I acted very wrongly," resumed Cambremer, "in allowing myself to become excited just now, and I admit that I ought to have begun by telling you the purpose of my visit."

"That would, indeed, be better."

"Well, sir, I must now tell you that the greatest of all chances has placed your friend's heiress in my way, and that I have come to Vannes in view of establishing her rights."

"Then you present yourself in the name of Monsieur de Porspoder's only daughter?"

"Exactly."

"You are, of course, not unaware of the fact that the child has not been seen for six years?"

"I heard so yesterday, and I think that I can explain her disappearance."

"Heaven knows, sir, that I am far from doubting your good faith; but I am afraid that you have been abused," said M. Allanic. "To any one else I should reply that this is all idle talk; but I will read you the letter which Monsieur de Porspoder's brother-in-law has written to me."

As he spoke the notary took up a large sheet of paper on the back of which there was an address in a clear hand-writing.

"It is from him," muttered Cambremer, who at once recognised M. Gévaudan's hand.

"This is what my former client writes," resumed M. Allanic: "His letter is dated from London, the 28th February, and I only received it on the day before yesterday. He writes to me as follows:—'Dear sir and friend—'"

"Friend!" interrupted old Leguern; "well, he has a good deal of impudence, I must say."

"That is merely a form," said the notary who did not appear desirous of

claiming his suspicious correspondent's friendship. "To resume: 'The events,' he says, 'which interrupted our relations have not, I hope, changed the interest which you have kindly shown on various occasions in my affairs.'"

"There's cheek for you now! the rascal" growled the old tar.

"You will be the less surprised at my long silence since leaving Kerpenhir, when I tell you that I was obliged to go to Morocco, to attend to important matters, only a short time after the death of my poor brother-in-law. The difficulty of communication is such that I was obliged to wait for years to return to Europe—"

"Years! I like that. I know ten three-masters at Nantes that go every year to Mogador and Tangiers and back!" exclaimed the irrepressable Leguern.

"Let Monsieur Allanic read his letter," retorted Cambremer, impatiently.

"Three months ago," resumed the notary, "I succeeded in setting sail for Europe, and at the beginning of February I arrived in London with my sister and niece. We intended to go to France after resting for a few days, and would to heaven that we had done so at once! An epidemic in the form of malignant fever, which was prevalent in England, at the time, seized hold of Madame de Porspoder and her daughter, and nothing could be done to save them. I had the grief of losing both of them in less than a week."

"I expected that!" muttered Cambremer, in a low tone.

"My poor little niece died first, and her mother expired in my arms two days later."

"Well! if that isn't an outrageous lie, I'll be hanged," exclaimed Leguern!

"You understand, sir," continued the notary imperturbably proceeding with his perusal, "how overcome I am by this horrible catastrophe. I had not, at first, the courage to write to you; but I must execute my poor sister's last wishes, and I now announce my intention, by this letter, of coming to see you at Vannes. The dear child who has so unfortunately died was her father's only heiress, and as she died before her mother, her fortune would go to the latter, my sister, who has made a will in my favour in her own hand-writing."

"We've got at it now!" muttered old Leguern, between his teeth.

"I have this document at hand, together with two certificates of death signed by the French consul, and shall have the honour of showing them to you, when I trust you will enable me to take possession as soon as possible."

"Oh! you may be sure of that!" growled the boatswain, who could not keep still.

"My affairs oblige me to return to my own country," continued M. Allanic, "and to my great regret, I shall not be able to remain long at Vannes; however, as the property of my brother-in-law consists only of the deeds deposited with you, I hope that the settlement will not require much time. The aim of this letter, therefore, my dear sir, is to ask you to take all necessary measures at once, so that the transfer of the property may not offer any difficulty. I will call upon you between the 8th and 10th of March, and I shall be glad to express to you in person the pleasure that I shall feel in renewing our acquaintance."

"Is that all, sir?" asked Cambremer.

"It is, sir," said the notary as he laid the letter upon the table, "and you can understand the surprise which I felt just now when you said that you came from the heiress of the Porspoder family."

"I do understand it; but I hope you will listen to me, and I undertake to prove to you that this man is an imposter and a murderer."

"I will hear you, sir; and I am willing to admit that the man whose letter I have just read does not inspire me either with sympathy or confidence. But his assertions are precise, and if he really does produce the authentic papers which he says he possesses, I do not see how I can refuse, after proper verification, of course, to hand him the deeds I hold."

"Will you do me the favor to confront me with this man when he comes to you?"

"I see no objection to that."

"Thank you, sir," said Cambremer, delightedly; "that is all that I wish, and I am sure that before the scoundrel appears, you will have made up your mind concerning him."

"Of course you will!" exclaimed old Leguern, "we have only to bring the little girl to see you."

"The little girl!" repeated the notary, in surprise.

"Would you know your friend's daughter?" demanded Cambremer, cagely.

"She was but three years old when she disappeared after her father's death, and a child's features change rapidly at that age. Still, I do not think that I could forget the expression of her eyes. I do not believe that there are such eyes as hers in all Brittany."

"You shall see her, sir. In an hour's time Baïa will be here!" exclaimed Chevalier Casse-Cou, rising.

"Baïa!" repeated the notary, with surprise; "that was, indeed, the name bestowed by her mother upon the heiress of the Porspoders."

"Yes, yes," said the old tar; "and at the time it was objected to by the rector of Kerpenhir, for he said that there was no such saint as that in the calendar."

"I am beginning to think, sir," said M. Allanic, "that there is a mystery in this story. I wish to clear it up as soon as possible. Be kind enough to bring this child here, and I promise you that I won't neglect anything to arrive at the truth. What do you want, Closmader?" now asked the notary of his clerk, who had put his head in at the office-door.

"A gentleman wishes to speak to you about a very urgent matter."

"Ask him to wait a moment."

"He says that it is he who wrote you the letter from—"

"What letter do you mean?"

"The letter from London—the one you have there."

"Ah! it is Bousenna!" exclaimed Cambremer, who had jumped up as though a bullet had struck him, his face assuming a threatening expression.

The name of Bousenna, which he had just uttered, had no meaning to his hearers, but the notary understood the situation, and he saw that the arrival of the brother-in-law was hastening the solution of this complicated affair. Being circumspect through professional habits, M. Allanic thought it best, above all things, to avoid a violent scene, and to save the dignity of the legal profession.

"Will you be kind enough, sir," said he to Cambremer, "to go into the next room with our friend Leguern? I think that it would be better,

in your own interest, that I should receive my London correspondent alone; but I promise to call you when the time comes."

The tone in which the notary spoke did not admit of any reply, and Cambremer resigned himself to this course; the more easily, also, from the fact that he would thus have time to reflect as to how he should come upon the enemy. Bousenna must be well prepared, and with his natural impudence was likely to defend himself ably if imprudently attacked.

"However, you will not let him go without confronting him with me?" said our hero to the notary. "I am ready to do all you wish."

"Rely upon me," replied M. Allanic. "I will arrange a sudden surprise."

As he spoke, he opened a door and led his two visitors into a small room which served as a library.

It contained no furniture excepting the shelves which held the numerous writings of the great Counsellor Dalloz: but it offered the great advantage of being separated merely from the office by a very thin partition.

"I do not ask you not to listen," said the notary, smiling; "but you must promise me not to stir until I come to let you out."

"I promise you!" sighed Chevalier Casse-Cou, greatly annoyed at being forced to remain inactive.

"The Moor won't lose anything by waiting," added the old tar.

M. Allanic closed the door, resumed his seat at the desk, twisted his white tie into place, as though to give himself the air of gravity suited to an important occasion, and said to his clerk, "Bring the gentleman in, and don't let anyone else come in until I have done with him. And if he tries to leave before I consent just prevent him."

A few seconds later, the foreigner entered with all the ease of a man who expects to be well received. "Good-day, my dear Monsieur Allanic," said he, in a careless tone; "how have you been since I had the pleasure of seeing you? How is your wife? How are the children? I am sure that you are the luckiest lawyer in France and Navarre."

"Thank you, sir," said the notary, quietly, "I and my family are well."

The worthy Breton had not shaken the hand which the new comer held out to him. He had merely pointed to a chair near his desk and remained seated in a dignified attitude. The effect of this cold reception was instantancous. His client's manner changed immediately, and M. Allanic almost regretted his coldness, for it was now probable that his visitor would be cautious.

M. Bousenna, who presented himself under the name of Joseph, had assumed, on this occasion, a style of attire which resembled that which he had sported as a bunker on the Boulevard Bonne Nouvelle, with a certain foreign touch added to it. He was carefully shaved, wore black gloves and neat shoes, and over a blue coat, with brass buttons, he had donned a cloak trimmed with fur, which made him look like a boyard from Moscow. However, his face still retained its harsh and crafty expression, and his eyes, which were half hidden by his heavy eyebrows, rolled about as though to inspect the notary's office on the sly.

He looked like a burglar trying to find a way to get out.

"You do not seem to be particularly glad to see me, sir," he said, drily, after a moment's silence, "and your manner reminds me that I have little time to lose. I will come to my purpose at once. Did you receive my letter?"

"Here it is; I have just been reading it for the second time,"

"Then you know what I have come for, and I presume that you are ready to settle the account which we have together, at once?"

"I expected you, it is true; but you must be aware that, before preparing the necessary papers, I needed to see you and to examine the documents which establish your right of inheritance to Monsicur de Porspoder's property."

"Do you doubt the authenticity of the papers?" said M. Bousenna, in a haughty tone.

"I do not doubt it, sir; but I wish to examine them."

"There is no difficulty about that. Here are the two certificates of death, and the certified copy of my sister's will. The original can be handed into court to-day or to-morrow, if that formality is indispensable."

M. Allanic took the papers handed to him by his client, and began to examine them attentively.

"These papers appear to me to be quite regular," he said, after a moment.

"That is really very fortunate," muttered M. Bousenna, between his teeth.

"I have an observation to make with regard to the will, however."

"What is it, if you please?"

"As you are aware I was formerly well acquainted with Madame de Porspoder, and I am sure that she only wrote Arabic, although she spoke French perfectly well, so I am surprised that she should have been able to draw up this will herself."

"True; but as you have not seen my sister for five or six years, you must admit that since she left Kerpenhir she had time to study."

"I did not know that there was anybody in Morocco who taught people to write French," said M. Allanic, looking quietly at his visitor.

"Well, you know it now," replied the foreigner. "You will admit, I suppose, that the signature of the French consul amounts to something, and he certified the document because my sister was personally known to him, and I myself had the honour to be introduced to him when last in London."

"I do not dispute that, sir; but, in order to cover my own responsibility, I shall be obliged to write to him and wait for his reply."

The client moved uneasily upon his chair, and for a moment his eyes darted lightning; however, he soon suppressed their fire.

"I thought I told you that I have but little time," said he, with affected mildness; "however, I see that I forgot to add that I would not hesitate to sacrifice a handsome sum of money to shorten the formalities to which you allude."

M. Allanic turned scarlet, and with difficulty restrained himself from seizing his impudent visitor by the throat.

"Sir," said he, dwelling upon his words, "I particularly wish to obtain information from all concerned in the matter, as I believe the daughter of Monsieur de Porspoder to be alive."

"Ah! do you think so?" said M. Bousenna, rising abruptly; "who told you so?"

"Some one who saw her."

"Indeed!"

As he spoke, the client put out his hand to take back the papers lying upon the desk, but the notary seized them and quietly placed them in his pocket. At the same time he rose up and went towards the library door

This motion was imitated on the other side. As M. Allanic went towards the partition, M. Bousenna went towards the door leading to the outer office.

"Closmader!" called out the notary. "Prevent this man leaving."

The voice of the clerk, who was in the front room, replied, "All right, sir."

Being now certain that his client would find some one in readiness for him, M. Allanic turned his back upon him, and put his hand upon the knob of the door to release Cambremer from his temporary prison.

The chevalier had passed a miserable quarter of an hour in the library. The partition was very thin, and he had not lost a word of what had been said by the notary and Bousenna. Each of the audacious statements volunteered by the sham banker had made him bound with rage and impatience, and he had been ten times on the point of opening the door and rushing into the room to confound the imposter. But Leguern had held him fast by his coat-tails, and this had given him time to remember that he had promised to keep quiet.

However, at the moment when M. Allanic made up his mind to deliver his prisoner there was another stir in the hiding-place. When Cambremer heard the notary mention that he had been told that the heiress of the Porspoders was alive, Cambremer understood that the decisive moment had come, and clinching his fist, prepared himself to make an energetic entrance. However, the ex-boatwain, who was so placed as not to be able to hear what was said very distinctly, thought it more than ever his duty to prevent a premature appearance, and this time he put his arms around Chevalier Casse-Cou's waist to prevent him from emerging from the library before the notary called him. This excess of prudence produced a very unexpected effect as will be seen.

"Monsieur Francis Cambremer, be kind enough to come here," said M. Allanic, in a loud, clear voice.

"Here I am!" called out Baïa's protector, pushing Leguern roughly aside—too roughly, indeed, for the old tar tripped, and making an instinctive effort to recover his equilibrium, he tugged at the chevalier and pulled him down with him.

The amazed notary, seeing this sudden upset, forgot M. Bousenna for an instant, to proceed to the rescue of the client whom he greatly preferred. He darted into the library to help Cambremer to rise, and found him swearing terribly, while endeavouring to free himself from his awkward friend.

M. Allanic, lending a helping hand, Francis was soon on his feet, and plunged into the office, calling out: "You will have me to deal with you miserable assassin! you will have me to deal with!"

A hollow groan replied from the depths of the office, but when Cambremer emerged from the library with his face scarlet with anger and his hands ready to seize the audacious scoundrel by the throat, he found nobody there. M. Bousenna had taken advantage of the notary's short absence to vacate the private room. An overturned chair testified to the precipitation with which he had fled.

"He is not far off," said the notary, who was following Cambremer closely.

The latter made but one bound from the private room to the front office, where he fell into the arms of the unfortunate head-clerk, who was covered with blood from a blow which had lighted upon his nose.

"He went that way, that way!" stammered the young Breton, pointing to the door that led to the stairs.

"Why didn't you stop him, you fool!" howled Chevalier Casse-Cou, repulsing the unlucky Closmader.

"Wait a bit, Monsieur Francis," said old Leguern. "I've good legs, and I'll have him for you!"

"This shows that the fellows from Cornouailles cannot hold on," muttered the notary, much annoyed by his clerk's defeat.

Thereupon all three darted out with the unanimity of a pack of hounds after a wild boar. An indescribable rush took place down the stairs, and, as the grotesque often mingles with that which is most serious in life, the sight of this mad pursuit was calculated to make everybody in Vannes laugh.

M. Allanic, who was in the rear, had the prudence to stop at the front door. It did not appear proper to him to run about the streets wearing a white tie; and his "greatness," like that of His Majesty King Louis XIV, "bound him," as Boileau puts it, "to the shore." So he contented himself with looking at Cambremer and Leguern as they rushed down the Rue des Chanoines, but there was no sign of the fugitive Bousenna.

It is true that chance furnished some compensation for this. On returning to the hall, he saw an object behind the door which he at once pounced upon, for he recognised it as the fugitive's fur cloak.

This discovery delighted the good notary at first, and he began to unfold the Moscovite garment, and to shake it to see if he could find some important paper; but he vainly turned it inside out, and even fumbled in the pockets, all that he found was a red handkerchief and a tortoise-shell snuff-box.

M. Allanic then began to think that M. Bousenna must have had a motive for ridding himself of his overcoat, and that in slipping it off, he had wished to baffle any pursuit. Such a garment, so seldom seen in the provinces, was indeed calculated to make him easily recognisable in a small town like Vannes. This change of skin, as it were, and this hasty departure, seemed to indicate that the unmasked villain had fled without intending to return.

"I hope they will catch him," said the notary, as he went up the stairs to help his unlucky clerk. He found poor Closmader bathing his face with cold water, and could not help revealing what he thought of his awkwardness. "You idiot!" he exclaimed, "couldn't you give him a blow in the stomach by running at him in ram-fashion as we do here in Brittany? Why did you let a Parisian strike you like that when you thrashed the fellow from Léon more than ten times over at the 'Pardon' at Faouët?"

"But he's not a Parisian, Monsieur Yves," said the aspirant to legal honours, in a piteous tone; "he's a Bedouin Arab."

"You are right there," said M. Allanic, smiling, in spite of himself; "and, after all, we are rid of him, as he has gone his way."

"And Vannes is not so very big, and the inn where he stopped can be found."

"You remind me that I foolishly forgot to ask where he was stopping. I have a great mind to send word to the police at once."

"I might go to the gendarmerie," said Closmader, as he wiped his face.

The clerk was putting on his hat to go, when Leguern and Cambremer came in quite breathless. "Ah! the miserable hound!" cried the old tar,

"he must know the town well, for he made straight for the market, where there was such a crowd that one can't get about at all."

"Yes, he disappeared in the crowd!" added Cambremer, with a gesture of despair.

"Bah!" exclaimed M. Allanic, "he is too tall and big to slip away like an eel in the mud. Besides, you don't care much about seeing him again, do you?" he added, looking at Cambremer.

"Don't I, though? I'd give ten years of my life to find myself face to face with the villain!" exclaimed Baïa's protector.

"Well, I hope that you will see him again, and that it may be in the dock at the assize court; for I must tell you that my mind is made up with regard to him."

"Then you don't doubt his being an imposter and a criminal in every way?"

"No," said the notary, firmly; "and I beg of you to excuse the somewhat cold reception that my professional prudence demanded."

The worthy man emphasized this frank declaration by warmly grasping Cambremer's hand, and the pressure was cordially returned.

"Thank you, sir," said Chevalier Casse-Cou, "and I thank you not merely on my own behalf, but in the name of the orphan girl."

M. Allanic's face showed signs of emotion, and his eyes filled with tears. "Can it be true that she really lives," he murmured, "and that I shall really have the joy of seeing my poor friend Mériadec's child once more?"

"Oh, you'll know her right away," said old Leguern. "She is exactly like her father."

"Where is she?" asked the notary, whose voice trembled with feeling.

"At my house, as sure as I'm a sailor; and in the handsomest room at the Chasse Marée too. After all, my shanty might be as fine as an admiral's state-room without being any too good for the heiress of the Porspoders."

"Closmader," now said M. Allanic, "go to the public prosecutor's office, tell him that I am coming, and let Jeannic come here to take charge of the office."

As he gave these orders the notary put on his cloak and gloves.

"Let us go, gentlemen," said he.

"You picked up that ugly bird's feathers, I see," said the old tar, pointing to the fur coat that M. Allanic had thrown upon a chair. "I am not surprised," said Leguern, "that the boys at the market did not recognise our description."

"He changes his coat now as often as he used to change his name," replied Cambremer.

"We will make some inquiries as we go along," said the notary, pointing out the way to the stairs to his two companions.

The little party hurried towards the port, and as they passed through the crowd of peasants selling their fowls and eggs, M. Allanic did not fail to reply by adroit questions to the multitude of greetings he was favoured with. He spoke the dialect of Lower Brittany as well as most of the descendants of the Druids, but he did not learn anything from what his countrymen replied. A longhaired peasant, with a very broad-brimmed hat, and full Breton breeches remembered having run against a Frenchman, as he called him, whose appearance agreed with that of M. Bousenna, but he had lost sight of him so quickly that he could not tell which way he had gone.

"I hope that he did not sail immediately from the port," said the notary, hastening on.

"No danger," replied the old tar, "the tide is low, and won't come in again for three hours."

"True; but we must keep a lookout."

"I'll let the head custom-house officer know, so that he may tell his men to be on the watch for any suspicious person."

"And I will see the public prosecutor as soon as I have looked at the dear little girl."

"Do you think that he will help us?" asked Cambremer, who had no great reason to congratulate himself upon the assistance of the authorities so far.

"I don't doubt it, for he had a suit in hand against that abominable foreigner, and when we have the proof that the papers which he left with me are false, he—"

"But you cannot have that proof till you receive the reply of the French consul in London; and, in the meantime, Bousenna will have abundant time to escape."

"Oh! I will have a description of him sent to every station."

"That would be a good idea; but, as we are never so well served as by ourselves, I'll do my part also," said Chevalier Casse-Cou.

"And I will help you," said the notary.

They had reached the port by this time, and old Leguern left them for a moment to glance at the boats along the shore, and tell the custom-house officers on duty to keep a good lookout.

Cambremer and the notary hastened on towards the inn, and had the gratification of seeing Baïa playing before the door, under Madame Mongis' care. As soon as she caught sight of her dear friend, the little girl ran towards him, and he caught her in his arms. They caressed each other, and uttered exclamations of pleasure for a moment or two, and then Cambremer turned to the notary, who was looking at the child with the deepest attention.

"Well, what do you think?" said our hero.

"Those are her eyes," muttered M. Allanic, "but she has grown so tall—"

The chevalier turned pale, for he had counted upon a full and immediate recognition.

"I shall soon know," resumed the good notary. And, suddenly changing his tone and language, he addressed a few guttural words to the little girl.

The effect of the "Open Sesame!" in the "Arabian Nights," could not have been more prompt. Just as Ali-Baba's exclamation opened the door of the cavern of the Forty Thieves, so did the words uttered by M. Allanic loosen Baïa's tongue.

The child raised her astonished eyes to this unexpected interpreter, and began to reply at once.

"It is she! it is Mériadec's daughter!" exclaimed the notary, covering her with kisses.

"What! do you speak Arabic?" exclaimed Cambremer.

"Certainly; Porspoder and his wife taught it to me."

"But you said nothing to me about it."

"Forgive me for keeping my knowledge for this decisive test," answered M. Allanic, giving Chevalier Casse-Cou his hand.

Madame Mongis, who had looked on at this scene from a distance, now slowly drew near.

"Heaven has sent us a deliverer!" exclaimed Cambremer, turning to her with delight.

XI.

THE NOTARY'S PLAN.

THREE days after the annoying disappearance of M. Bousenna, a sloop was doubling the southern extremity of the Isle of Arz, and going rapidly towards the little port of Sarzeau.

The sea on which the light bark sailed was not so wild as that which beats against the granite rocks of Finistère. It was more like a lake with irregular shores broken by a multitude of little creeks into which the waves glide softly over smooth sand. A veritable archipelago varied this miniature Mediterranean, and little isles of every size and shape followed one upon another, scarcely separated by narrow channels.

The weather was magnificent for Brittany, that is to say, a smart northern breeze was rapidly dispersing the clouds, and a bit of blue sky was visible from time to time. In spite of the coming equinoctial storms there was no cloud visible in the distance, and everything argued an easy and rapid voyage.

Morbihan—which in the Celtic language means little sea—is not subject to storms, and this had not a little to do with the mode of travel which the passengers in the sloop had chosen. Cambremer had not forgotten his trip to Greece, and would not willingly expose himself to the annoyances of a sea voyage; but Leguern had declared that they would have fair weather all the way. The chevalier had no reason to repent having had confidence in the old sailor, and far from being sea-sick, he looked very bright as he sat at the stern of the sloop, between the faithful Cassonade and M. Allanic, that model of Armorican notaries. The three friends had gathered round Leguern, who held the tiller with the ease of a thorough sailor, and the conversation went on briskly.

"The public prosecutor told you, then, that the scoundrel could not have left the country?" said Cambremer.

"He is sure of that. The report is precise, and orders have been given at all the stations, to all the rural guards, and all the custom-house officers. The scamp whom you call Bousenna cannot get away by land or sea."

"It's my idea that we ourselves shall catch him," said Leguern, shaking out the ashes from his pipe.

"Ah! But he's a cunning chap," thoughtfully said Cassonade, who remembered his mishaps at the Barrière d'Enfer and elsewhere.

"Yes," said the notary, "the adventures which you have related to me are more suggestive of romance than real life, and since the days of Coignard, the escaped convict who became a colonel in the time of Louis XVIII,* no robber has ever been known to play so many parts. But what is possible in Paris is almost impossible in Brittany, where everybody is so well known."

"However," observed Cambremer, "you now know that Baïa and her

* See M. du Boisgobey's exciting novel, "The Convict Colonel."

poor mother were imprisoned for five years in the tower at Kerpenhir, and watched over by a scoundrel disguised as a wealthy foreigner. All that took place without any suspicion of the mystery on the part of the people of the country?"

"The stories of the ghosts at the manor never seemed to me to be true," said the old tar.

"Poor child!" said M. Allanic, "how she must have suffered during that frightful captivity! If you could only have understood her yesterday, when she was telling me about her dreadful life, and her poor mother's agonies! I could not keep the tears from my eyes when I thought that they had been so near to me and I powerless to deliver them!"

"It was certainly not your fault," resumed old Leguern, "and if the magistrates had listened to you at the time, they would not have let the Bedouin go."

"But there are things that I cannot account for," said the sceptical Cassonade.

"What are they?" demanded the notary.

"In the first place, why did not Madame de Porspoder teach her daughter French? She had plenty of time to do so."

"I asked Baïa that, and she told me that their jailer forbade the poor prisoners to speak anything but Arabic. He was, no doubt, afraid that they might succeed in communicating with the peasantry, and he always threatened them with terrible punishment if they disobeyed his orders. Besides, the widow of my unfortunate friend Mériadec never knew French well, and could scarcely write it at all."

"Those are good reasons, I'll admit that," rejoined the sagacious ex-grocer, "but there are also other things that seem very strange to me. Why the mischief is it that Bousenna, who wanted to get rid of them, took the trouble to take them to Paris? It would have been much easier to have killed them and buried them at Kerpenhir."

"The same thought occurred to me," replied M. Allanic, "and after I had questioned our dear little girl for a long time, I concluded that the double murder was ordered by Bousenna, and would have taken place at Kerpenhir, but that the jailer refused to obey his instructions. The monster who imprisoned them was forced to undertake his hideous task himself, and as he was afraid to reappear in this part of the country before having perfected all his diabolical plans, he was obliged to get them to Paris. Baïa tells me that she travelled in a post-chaise, and that it was closed, and that her dreadful jailer watched them all the way."

"It was that wretch Pavard, of course, who acted as a jailer; but why did he wait so long to end it all?"

"The delay must have been on account of certain combinations which we can merely suspect. Everything leads me to believe, however, that Bousenna was not merely carrying on this attempt to obtain Baïa's inheritance; he was also engaged in vast smuggling operations. He must have waited to act till he had become rich through fraud and till years had passed after his brother-in-law's murder. He calculated with almost mathematical precision the best time for advancing his daring claim, and he broke up his business in Paris in consequence of that intention."

"Why did he set the date of the month of March?" asked Cambremer.

"Because he did not wish to lose any part of the fortune which he had acquired by theft and murder. All arrears of income return to the state after the lapse of five years, and on the 22nd of March, 1831, the first six

months' instalment of the income which started from the end of 1825 would expire. Now, Monsieur Bousenna was a man of order, above all things, and he wished to receive that twenty-five thousand francs entire."

"Yes, it must be so," muttered Chevalier Casse-Cou, convinced that the notary was right.

"I'll admit it," said Cassonade, concluding, as his master did, that M. Allanic was right; "but all this does not tell us how we shall catch the villain."

The good notary seated himself on the gunwale of the sloop, and crossed his arms like an orator about to deliver a discourse. "My dear friends," said he, in a clear and deliberate manner; "since I have recognised my poor Porspoder's daughter, I have spent three days in thinking over all that relates to this Bousenna, just as I might examine one of my files of papers, and my mind is made up. You may believe that I have reflected carefully before asking you to go with me where I wish to take you. You have confidence in me, and I thank you for it."

"There's no need of that after what you have done for us," interrupted Cassonade. "Madame Mongis and her young lady are now with little Baïa at your house, Monsieur Paul lunches and dines every day at your table, and as for ourselves, we—"

"Don't let us speak of that," said M. Allanic, hastily; "my children are only too happy to have an additional sister, and their mother, my dear Alliette, cannot bear to let that excellent lady and her daughter out of her sight. It is I who am under obligations to you, and I wish to pay my debt by leading our expedition. My wife somewhat opposed it when I told her that I might not return till Sunday, and, that I should, perhaps, have to deal with some robbers; but she knows that I am able to defend myself, and, after all, she is not very anxious. Even when a man has been a notary for seven years he can still use his fists and fire a gun," added the daring lawyer.

"Well, then, we are going to hunt for Bousenna?" said Cassonade, rubbing his hands.

"To fight him, which would be better still," exclaimed Cambremer.

"We may perhaps do both," said M. Allanic, quietly.

"But where are we going?" asked Chevalier Casse-Cou.

"We are now in front of Penblay," said old Leguern, "and if the breeze keeps up we shall be able to anchor off Sarzeau before another hour has passed by."

"And shall we stop there?" asked Cambremer.

"No," said the notary; "we have still a mile and a half to go on foot."

"And where are we going to?"

"To the Château of Susicinio."

"Ah! yes, I know that name," said Chevalier Casse-Cou.

"It is the name which was assumed by the woman who hired that house in the Rue Basse du Rempart," exclaimed Cassonade.

"Yes, and it is the name of the meeting place about which Bousenna wrote to his accomplice Pavard."

"I know the letter, which you showed me, by heart," said the lawyer, "and the words are these: 'The grand centre is still at Susicinio; but you must first pass the Chénaie Etétée.'"

"That is it."

"Well, having read this important letter, and thought it over, I made a

search similar to those made of the great naturalist Cuvier, who, with a single piece of bone to guide him, could reconstruct an entire fossil animal. It was necessary, first of all, to find out the places that Bousenna spoke of. As for Suscinio, that was easy enough; the château is known everywhere even beyond Brittany, and English visitors come to see it frequently; in fact, they come here for that express purpose. The Chênaie Etêtée gave me more trouble. In this part of the country all tree stumps or hollow-trunks are called by such names, and there are many of the kind round about here."

"But did you finally discover where this place was?"

"My wife put me on the right track. She lately inherited some property from an old aunt—some land in the parish of Trevinec, and she remembered that there was a hollow oak there which seemed as though it were intended expressly to conceal robbers."

"It seems to me that I remember such a one; isn't it near the lake at Sarzcau?" said Leguern.

"Yes, that is the tree. More than one robbery was committed near there by armed miscreants, in the time of the guerrilla warfare, and as the sea is close by, escape is possible in case of pursuit, providing a boat be handy."

"That would suit our man exactly," said Cassonade.

"I agree with you, and it is upon this idea that I have founded my plan."

"Whatever it may be I will follow it," said the enthusiastic Cambremer.

"Let me tell you, first of all, what it is," resumed the lawyer, smiling.

"You yourself told me that the rascal carried on smuggling in Paris, and the words which he made use of in his letter to his accomplice clearly show that he does the same on the coast."

"That is as evident as anything can be."

"Well, then, I made various inquiries of the custom-house inspector, and I learned that almost all the smuggling that escapes his watchfulness goes on at the peninsula of Rhuis, where we are about to land. He did not admit this without reluctance, for his administration, like all others, pretends to be infallible; but he finally confessed that his men had for the last four or five years been constantly baffled in their search for some smugglers there."

"Then Bousenna's band have selected this part of the coast for their fraudulent purposes."

"They are almost the masters of it. However, all imaginable precautions have been taken, the posts have been tripled, the rounds have been multiplied, agents have been dismissed who were suspected of having allowed themselves to be bribed; but all of no avail. Forbidden goods are landed on stormy nights, deposited in some hiding-place that cannot be discovered, and sent in small lots into the interior. The inspector is convinced that the inhabitants on the coast connive with them, and that the smugglers have agents in every parish; however, he has never been able to find one of them."

"Of course not!" said old Leguern, "the excisemen are real 'dolphins,' and the peasants are no smarter than they are. Would you believe that last month there were some fellows from Landrezac who told me that every night they heard the 'death-cart' go by."

Cambremer looked at M. Allanic to ask what this meant.

"It is a Breton superstition," said the notary. "The people about

here imagine that the chariot of death drives along at night-time, making a great noise, and the story that our friend Leguern mentions, confirms my suspicions."

"I don't see what that has to do with our affair," said Cambremer.

"Why! the phantoms, the pall, and all the rest of the weird apparatus, hide just so many tricks of the smugglers, and as even in these latter days the ruins of Suscinio are believed to be the scene of all kinds of apparitions, I now feel sure of the place where we shall find Bousenna."

"If he has not left it before we get there."

"I have reasons for believing the contrary. I have been told by the naval commissioner that a suspicious-looking brig has been cruising about for the last two days along the coast between Larmor and Saint Gildas. The wise acres at Vannes think that this craft is here waiting to convey Monsieur Bousenna to his native land."

"Ah!" exclaimed Cambremer, "if we succeed in catching him, it will be to you that we shall owe our success."

"You do me too much honour, my dear friend," replied M. Allanic, "and I trust that you will help me, but in the meantime I must tell you my famous plan."

"We shall land in ten minutes," said the old tar, by way of warning.

"Don't be afraid; my explanation will not last long. This is what I propose. We will all three land with our guns and provision bags, and leave our friend Leguern in the sloop. I am very well known in the village of Sarzeau, and I cannot avoid speaking for a moment to such clients as I may meet; but as it is idle to tell them of our plans, I shall say that I have come with two friends from Paris to shoot some rabbits and dine on the grass near the château. The ruins of Suscinio are worth the trouble of a visit, and no one will be surprised at our excursion. Besides, the better to play our part as travelling antiquarians, we will first of all go to see the village 'lions,' the seventeenth-century church, which is not without interest, and the house where Le Sage was born, in 1668."

Cambremer did not know that the author of "Gil Blas" and "Turcaret" had been born in this out-of-the-way place, and under any other circumstances he would have been charmed to profit by the notary's erudition, but at the present time his mind was far from historical associations and memories.

"What shall we do after that?" asked he.

"We will take a little boy with us to carry our basket, and guide us across the country, and we will quietly proceed to the château. It does not take more than an hour and a half to get there. When we are there we can send the boy away and breakfast at our ease. This will not prevent us from inspecting the ruins from top to bottom, so as to choose our sleeping-place for the night."

"Then we must sleep there?" asked Cassonade, quietly.

"That is indispensable, and we shall perhaps have to begin again to-morrow evening. You will not be quite as comfortable as at the Chasse Marée, but I think that I can promise you that you will not find the place tiresome."

"If I can only come face to face with Bousenna, the rest will be of no consequence," said Cambremer.

"I shall be glad, however," said Cassonade, "if he leaves his gang behind."

"Bah! we have three guns and three brace of pistols," replied the war-like notary.

"What becomes of me in all this?" now said Leguern; "am I to have none of the fun? I shouldn't think that a sailor would be amiss in the matter."

"You, my man, I have kept for another purpose; and you will be more useful to us in the sloop than on shore."

"Well, then, tell me where to steer to."

"Can you double the Pointe de Rhuis between now and night-time; pass the Saint Gildas shoals, and the Beniguet Rock, and throw your grapple into the Susicinio creek at nightfall?"

"It will depend upon the weather; but the wind seems to be shifting to the north, and if I can leave Morbihan between now and two o'clock the rest will be all right."

"Good! Then it is settled; you must anchor near Susicinio when the sun is down."

"What am I to do when I get there?"

"You need only keep your wits about you. You must keep both eyes open mind—one eye upon the brig, which you will see cruising about, and the other one upon the shore. If the brig seems to be coming up, you must wait till it is within two or three cables' length, then quietly jump into the water and hasten to let us know. If you hear three shots fired, one after another, you will know that we are there, and that you must make haste."

"I understand," said Leguern, steering towards the shore of the little creek beyond which lay the village of Sarzeau.

XII.

IN WHICH CASSONADE DISPLAYS THE WISDOM OF A SERPENT.

AN hour after old Leguern had landed his passengers upon the sandy beach of Sarzeau, the little caravan, led by the notary, reached the Château of Susicinio, going across country. Everything had gone on as M. Allanic had planned. The village idlers had not failed to salute the lawyer, who was very popular everywhere in the neighbourhood. After the necessary exchange of polite greetings, the worthy notary had told his little story, and the inhabitants of the village had readily believed that the aim of his journey was simply to do the honours of the place to a couple of Parisians. At the landing place they found one of the lads who hang about the country in Brittany, just as they do about the Boulevard du Temple in Paris, and they entrusted him with the two baskets full of provisions, liquid and solid, provided by Madame Alliette's careful hand.

This Breton urchin was the only person allowed to join the little party, but it must be admitted that M. Allanic had some trouble in getting rid of an archæologist belonging to the place, who very much wished to join the expedition, so as to tell the two strangers all about Susicinio. He had got rid of him, however, by a painful sacrifice, for he had been compelled to listen to a long dissertation about a Roman road still visible in the environs and on the actual frontiers of the land of the Venetes.

They advanced in good order, the notary at the head of the column, Chevalier Casse-Cou and his squire in the centre, and the bearer of the provisions as a rear guard. The three men had their guns under their arms, and their game-bags at their sides, and if Pétronille could have beheld her

spouse under these circumstances she would have declared that he looked absolutely soldierly, for indeed the indefatigable Cassonade walked on with the deliberation of a grenadier about to storm a fortress.

Cambremer himself evinced all the ease of an accomplished sportsman, and the ardour of a young soldier. But the most singular member of the detachment was certainly M. Yves-Conan-Patern Allanic. The notary-royal had donned a goatskin coat, and, in place of the black pantaloons, which he sported in his office, he wore some baggy breeches recalling the garments of his Celtic ancestors. This national dress was completed by some thick leathern gaiters and a glazed hat.

Thus attired, the avenger of the house of Porspoder would scarcely have been taken for a man whose days were spent in drawing up contracts. He looked more like one of the guerillas whom his terrible fellow-countryman, George Cadoudal, once commanded, and, indeed, in less peaceful times. M. Allanic would probably have fought the "blues," as the Republicans used to be called, for he came of a race as warlike as it was true to the king.

At that moment, however, he was not thinking of politics, and his gun was only loaded with small shot, still, that did not alter the fact that he knew how to handle it. He had brought down two wild ducks, which had risen from the salt marshes at twenty paces from the road, and as he popped them into his bag, he looked keenly at the sea.

From the spot which the party had reached, the eye could take in all the eastern part of Morbihan. The sea had gone down, and great banks of yellow sand stood out clearly against the greenish background of the waters of the bay. Some fishing-smacks, with canvas spread, were drawing towards the entrance of the Vannes River, like a flock of gulls.

In spite of his anxiety, Cambremer could not help admiring this pleasing picture, and allowing its melancholy charm to soothe him. All the bay was tranquil, and the sea calm, except for a line of snowy foam, which occasionally rose westward, and for some small red clouds that ran along the horizon.

"Do you see that white spot over there, between that great black rock and the shore?" asked M. Allanic, who had stopped to load his gun again.

"Yes," replied Cambremer, "it is the only sail to be seen over there."

"Well, let me tell you," said the notary, with a quiet laugh of satisfaction, "that if old Leguern's sloop is a good sailer, and can double the peninsula in the run he is now making, why, as soon as he has passed the shoals he will have enough wind behind him to enable him to anchor near Suscinio."

"If the weather remains good till the worthy fellow gets under shelter."

"Oh! he may be a little shaken by the swell, but the squall is far off, and he won't run in before four or five. Between now and then, Leguern, who is a good sailor, will have rounded the Pointe de Bocaven."

"I don't pretend to be a sailor," said Cambremer, "but I fancy it will be bad on sea to-night."

"A reason the more why the game we are beating up should come out of its den," said the notary; "smugglers are like porpoises, they show in a squall."

Cambremer now nudged his shoulder, and pointed to the boy with the baskets.

"You are right," muttered M. Allanic, biting his lips; "that fellow

only understands the dialect of Lower Brittany, still, we cannot be over careful."

The boy whom Chevalier Casse-Cou suspected, was about twelve years old, and his face was, by no means, an intelligent one. Thin, sunburned, and ragged, the poor little devil looked with a stupid air at the fine gentleman who had hired his services, and seemed more fitted to inspire compassion than mistrust; however, Cassonade, who liked to go to the bottom of everything, determined to try an experiment.

"Come here, my lad!" said he, "I must give you some money to buy yourself some wooden shoes."

The boy's eyes sparkled under the long hair which half hid his face; he laid down his basket at once, and ran without a word to Cassonade, and held out his hand.

"Aha!" said the squire, giving him the promised coin, "it seems that you understand my French."

M. Allanic and Cambremer exchanged glances, and mentally resolved to be careful.

"Come, gentlemen," now said the notary gaily, "let us make haste, if we don't want to breakfast when respectable people dine. Your humble servant is famished."

"So am I," said Cassonade earnestly.

"How long will it be before we reach the château?" asked Cambremer.

"Fully half an hour, even if we walk fast. In ten minutes more we shall see the keep."

They again began to walk on, and M. Allanic enlivened the party by some lawyers' stories, which even the chevalier laughed at.

Confidence is almost as contagious as fear, and when the excursionists had come within sight of the walls of the old fortress of the Dukes of Brittany, Cambremer and Cassonade firmly believed that the hazardous expedition upon which their new friend had induced them to embark would be successful.

"What do you think of the way in which our ancestors used to build in the year 1250?" said the notary, pointing to the colossal pile, "six towers are still standing out of eight, and the keep is unharmed; above the great door, the arms of Brittany are as clearly defined as though they had just been carved in the stone. People don't build houses in Paris that will last six hundred years."

"This looks something like the Château of Vincennes," said Cassonade, admiringly.

"Where shall we stow ourselves to-night?" asked Cambremer, who was not at all disposed to go into the question of mediæval architecture.

"Let me manage that; I know the ruins of Suscinio as well as I know the civil code. There is an ogival chapel in the western tower, where we shall be quite at home. The last time that I came here with some ladies from Lorient, and my cousin, the frigate captain, I made them bring some straw, and we sent a boy to get us some dry wood, and lighted a fire in the great chimney of the guard-room."

"Well, let us go in, for I long to have a look at the robbers' den."

"Blue Beard must have lived in a place like this," muttered Cassonade.

"I will go first, my noble lords," said the notary, gaily, for he was a little given to using the language of chivalry.

At the moment when the three friends entered by the dark postern, a long and lugubrious cry arose from the tower on the right.

"Why! that is an owl hooting in the daylight!" exclaimed Cassonade, who felt a little surprised.

In order that nothing might be wanting to the picturesqueness of the excursion, M. Allanic made his friends lunch upon the little platform of the western tower. He was not without some mistrust as regards the lad whom he had found at Sarzeau, and he did not care to let him think that the visit to the ruins had any hidden purpose. In the daytime the presence of this youthful servant was of no consequence, but the notary intended to find some excuse for getting rid of him by nightfall. He drew Cassonade aside to thank him for putting him on his guard, and pressed his hand, saying: "Don't be uneasy, everything will be properly arranged."

The repast was as merry as a pic-nic of gay excursionists is apt to be, and three bottles of wine were drunk, high class claret, which had been gaining flavour for fifteen years past in the notary's cellar in the Rue des Chanoinés.

It must be admitted that the appetite of the party had been greatly sharpened by the excursion, and that, in spite of his anxiety, Cambremer himself did honour to the pastry made by Madame Alliette. As for Cassonade, he ate and drank like an English soldier about to storm a fort.

From the point of vantage which M. Allanic had selected for spreading the cloth, the eye could take in a vast landscape. The whole of the Peninsula of Rhuys lay beneath one like a map. On one side Morbihan was clearly defined, and on the other lay the vast sea extending out of sight. The steep shores of Belle-Ile-en-Mer rose up like a dark line upon the horizon.

This panorama won admiring exclamation from time to time, from Pétronille's husband, who, previously, had never seen anything more ocean-like than the Lake of Enghien.

M. Allanic was less enthusiastic, but he often glanced towards the open sea, and once or twice he put up his hand to shade his eyes, and examine some details of the view more distinctly.

When they reached the last course of their hearty meal, the notary-royal gravely lit a pipe reserved for such occasions, offered cigars to his two friends, and repaired with them to the parapet of the platform.

"Do you see that ship, over there far away in the distance?" said he.

"Its hull can scarcely be seen above the water," said Cambremer, "but I have a sailor's eye, and I am sure that it is going westward."

"Until it turns towards the coast," said M. Allanic. "You talk like an old pilot. But what you cannot know, and which I must tell you is, that the ship in question is the suspected brig, watched over by my friend the naval commissioner."

"The one that is waiting for Bonsenna?"

"Precisely. I know it by its gearing, and besides, it is going beyond the route followed by vessels proceeding to the Loire or coming from it. I feel more and more sure that we have come here at the right time. If we had waited a day later, we should have been too late."

"You think, then—"

"That it will be for to-night."

"And how do you mean to prevent those scoundrels from landing?"

"I will tell you that presently, when we are alone. As for myself, the whole question is to know whether Leguern will take his place at the right moment."

"Do you see his boat?"

"I am almost sure that the boat down there in front of Saint Gildas is his. He is running quite eight knots an hour, and if he keeps it up, he will be in sooner than he need be. However, the breeze seems to me to freshen, and I should not be surprised if we had a touch of the equinoctial storms to-night."

"The deuce take it!" said Cassonade, "that would be bad!"

"Bah! it may be nothing, but, after all, perhaps the north-easter will be the cause of our success."

The notary had assumed a mysterious air, which deterred Cassonade from saying anything more. All this conversation, besides, had taken place in a low tone, so as not to be overheard by the boy, who was apparently very busy putting the plates away.

"Now," said M. Allanic, "we may as well begin to examine the ruins and choose our resting-place for the night."

After giving his instructions in Breton to the lad whom he did not wish to take with him through the château, the notary began to lead his friends into the feudal labyrinth of the courts, halls, and towers of Susicinio. The château formed an irregular pentagon, and its internal arrangements had not suffered to any great extent. The visitors were, therefore, able to explore the vast edifice from top to bottom. Almost all the stairways were dilapidated, but with the exercise of a little care they could be climbed, and M. Allanic ran up them with the lightness of a schoolboy going to scare the crows.

The result of this examination was that they felt convinced that if the smugglers were hidden in the ruins, it must be in a vault of which the entrance was not apparent. Some traces of recent occupation were noted on the steps of the upper galleries, such as some pieces of broken bottles, pipes, and similar things. However, all this might have been left by tourists. The large fireplace of the guard-room had evidently been used, and as strangers were not in the habit of staying all night at the château, there was some reason for believing that the gang sometimes used it as a sleeping-place.

By dint of carefully examining the halls and dark passages, M. Allanic succeeded in discovering that the spiral steps by which one of the towers was reached, broke off on the first floor. "Those steps seem to me to extend under the flags on which we are walking," said he, knocking upon the stones with the butt of his gun.

There was no opening, however, between the large flagstones, and, if any subterranean communication existed, the passage must be very carefully hidden.

"I am afraid that we shall not find the vault where they hide themselves," muttered Cassonade.

"I did not think that we should," said the notary, smiling.

At this unexpected reply, Cambremer could not restrain his surprise.

"Then what did we come for?" he asked, somewhat curtly.

M. Allanic smiled, leaned upon his gun, struck a tragic attitude, and, in a solemn voice, began to recite the following lines of Racine:

"Approach, my children, for the hour has come,
To tell the secret I have long concealed."

Chevalier Casse-Cou, fond as he was of literature, was in no humour to hear any quoting, and he did not know whether to laugh or to feel vexed.

"I am in earnest," said the notary, returning to every-day parlance, "and if you will trust me, I will tell you what to do."

"I am listening, and am ready to obey you blindly," said Cambremer, with some impatience.

"Well, then, my friends, the conclusion to which I have come is this: We must send that lad back to Sarzeau, for I don't altogether trust him. I will send him ahead with the baskets, and say that we shall follow in an hour's time."

"If we are going to stay here all night," muttered Cassonade, "we should do as well to keep the provisions with us."

"I have some bread, a game-pie, and two bottles of wine in my bag," said the notary, smiling; "besides, my flask is filled with old brandy, and we sha'n't die of hunger or thirst with all that; but it is important that the lad should not guess our purpose."

"That is understood," said Cambremer; "but what of ourselves?"

"We will share our tasks between us. At night-time two of us will go down to the shore to wait for old Leguern, whose help is indispensable to us; the third will remain here."

"Which will be the most dangerous post?"

"The one who remains at the château will probably be the most in peril."

"Then I shall remain here," said Chevalier Casse-Cou, quietly.

XIII.

IN WHICH WE WITNESS A GHOST-HUNT.

NIGHT had fallen some time already, and Cambremer waited at the place assigned to him. The notary's plan was executed in every respect. The lad had gone back to Sarzeau, or, at all events, he left the château, proceeding in the direction of the village.

M. Allanic, when he dismissed him, had taken the precaution to watch him from the top of the tower platform, and had seen him go across the country with the slow pace that peasants usually adopt.

Reassured as to the intentions of the suspicious lad, the notary returned to his companions, and placed them at their posts, in accordance with the plan arranged after the repast.

Chevalier Casse-Cou seated himself in the chapel in the tower, and the lawyer gave him his final instructions. They were very simple. To watch, listen, and act, according to circumstances, this was all that the leader of the expedition recommended to his valiant assistant. In case of great danger, Cambremer was to fire a shot from the ogival window.

"We shall be near enough to the château to hear you," said M. Allanic, "and will come to your assistance at once."

With this assurance they parted, after a cordial leave-taking, and it was agreed that, towards midnight, the forlorn sentinel should be relieved from duty. Cassonade had a great mind to object to this scattering of the forces, but a warning look from his master silenced him.

Chevalier Casse-Cou remained alone. He had provided himself with a double-barrelled gun and a brace of pistols, and thus had four bullets ready for any enemy that appeared. These weapons came from the arsenal of M. Allanic, who had always had a taste for fighting, and who had equipped the little party himself.

Cambremer did not wish for either fire or light, indeed he desired to remain unseen, and he had chosen his post very sagaciously. The chapel communicated with an immense gallery that extended to the opposite corner of the château. A man seated on the stone bench near the recess of the only window could see to a great distance without being seen himself.

The chevalier ensconced himself in this hiding-place, and made up his mind that he would not stir if he could help it. He was sure that he could not be attacked from behind, as the chapel had no exit except by the doorway leading to or from the gallery. By leaning forward, moreover, he could pass his head between the iron cross-bars of the window, and watch the external approach of the building. The place was thus an unapproachable retreat, and a post of observation both within and without.

The window, moreover, opened directly upon the front, where the main entrance of the château was located, so that no one could go in or out without being seen by the invisible sentinel. Cambremer found this to be the case when his two companions went off. He saw them cross the old moat thirty feet away from him, and go slowly along with their guns upon their shoulders.

He thought that they took the road to Sarzeau, instead of turning towards the sea, and he surmised that the notary did this intentionally.

For his own part he remained quietly seated, determined not to stir, however long he might remain alone. But, although he did not move, he thought the more. His activity had concentrated itself in his brain, and his over-excited imagination already evoked the image of the odious Bousenna emerging from some vault like that near the Barrière d'Enfer, and falling to the ground when he shot him in the head, as he fully intended to do.

The notary's explanations had been short, but he had seemed so sure of himself that Cambremer did not doubt but what the climax was approaching, and he watched and listened eagerly. The moon was full, and shone at intervals in the sky, which was heavy with clouds. It had risen behind the château, and the huge shadows of the high walls reached afar; however, the light entered the gallery through various opening in the ruins.

After sunset, the western wind rose and blew hard, so that M. Allanic's predictions were fulfilled. Indeed, two hours had not elapsed after his departure, when a violent storm arose. The wind rushed through the ruins with a mournful howl, and the surging of the distant waves on the coast sounded like far-off thunder.

It was evident that an equinoctial storm was at hand, and as to that, Cambremer was not likely to be mistaken. He had often, in the month of March, seen the wild waves raging fiercely upon the Saint Malo coast, so that he knew well enough when a frightful storm was approaching.

As the gale increased in fury he remembered the notary's remarks, and wondered what would occur on the shore. Would Leguern arrive in time? would he be later in arriving than the mysterious brig? would Bousenna and his gang profit by this frightful night to leave their den and attempt to embark?

Chevalier Casse-Con had been lost in conjectures for some time, when he thought that he saw a shadow moving near the entrance of the château. From the place he occupied the distance was considerable, and, besides, the moon had just disappeared behind a dark cloud, so that he at first thought that he had been mistaken. But, as he looked more attentively, he perceived that something very unusual was going on.

A black mass was slowly passing along accompanied by human forms, and the group seemed to emerge from the walls. After a few moments of uncertainty, which seemed ages to him, Cambremer beheld a most singular-looking procession upon which the moon now clearly shone.

At ten paces from the postern gate, and upon the road leading to the sea, four men were dragging and pushing along a kind of chariot, upon which there lay a coffin. All the men in charge of this singular equipage seemed to be clad in gowns and cowls, like the monks in the fifth act of "Lucretia Borgia." They were not, however, singing the "De Profundis," as in Victor Hugo's play.

Such a sight, in this lonely spot and amid this fearful storm, was calculated to startle the bravest man, and, under any other circumstances, Cambremer might not have escaped a feeling of fear. But he was too full of the situation to forget M. Allanic's warnings. The stories which the notary had told him returned to his mind at once, and he realised that this funeral masquerade was but a trick of the smugglers.

It was evident that the thieves were making up their minds to escape, and the black cloth screening the sham coffin which they were taking away was simply a covering which concealed some receptacle containing the funds of the gang. Thanks to their ingenious disguise, they felt tolerably sure of frightening all who might be abroad at night time, whether sailors or custom-house officers, and if the brig was found at the appointed place, the embarkation could be successfully effected.

Their departure from the château proved, moreover, that Bousenna was not aware of the presence of his enemies, for he would not have risked this attempt at departure had he suspected that one of his foes was on the watch. Still, Cambremer was none the less perplexed.

His first thought had been to fire a shot, as agreed upon, at the same time sending a signal to his friends and a bullet into the brains of one of the rascals with the chariot. However, such violent measures might cause everything to go wrong, and after an instant's reflection, he made up his mind to leave his post and follow the band, so as to intervene when it reached the coast, where M. Allanic and Cassonade were already on the watch.

He rose and walked towards the gallery which he had to cross in its entire length to find the steps, but he had scarcely passed the door of the chapel when he stood rooted to the spot by the most unexpected of all sights. He beheld in front of him a long white figure, upright and motionless as a statue. Cambremer, although a Breton and the son of a sailor, was not superstitious. He had been brought up by a pious mother, and had retained the faith of his childhood intact, and, although he had sometimes erred, his youthful follies had not altered his religious convictions. Still, he did not believe in ghosts.

Seeing this figure in the gallery, he did not feel that indescribable sensation which the seemingly supernatural will often cause in the bravest heart. Old soldiers who fought valiantly at the Beresina and at the storming of Tarragona, have been known to refuse to spend a night in a graveyard.

However, Chevalier Casse-Cou was not so easily frightened, and the apparition surprised rather than alarmed him. He had stopped short upon setting foot in the gallery, and had even had the presence of mind to cling to the wall. Thus concealed, he hoped to be able to watch the strange figure, which stood out against the dark background of the vast hall. The

apparition was white, as ghosts always are, and indeed the mysterious being thus wandering among the ruins seemed to be clad in a winding-sheet. This also was the regular thing for a phantom, and the mournful drapery seemed to be especially suited to a soul in pain.

Cambremer, after the first shock, regained full control over his nerves; and he firmly believed that he saw before him some disguised accomplice of the crafty Bousenna. The funereal garb of the seeming spectre coincided perfectly with the practices of the smugglers spoken of by M. Allanic.

The procession, which was at this moment proceeding towards the shore, was the principal feature of a serio-comic performance. The apparition in the gallery was a mere outside matter, intended, not to attract, but to keep off the public. This, at least, was the chevalier's opinion, and he was quite ready to act upon it.

With his gun at hand, and his right hand upon the butt of one of his pistols, he waited to see how the soul in pain would conduct itself. The pale light of the moon feebly illuminated the gallery, but beyond the gaps in the ruins, through which it penetrated, all was gloom.

Cambremer was, therefore, unable to see anything more than an indistinct form which remained perfectly motionless. It looked like the figure of some saint come down from its niche.

The chevalier's scrutiny could not continue long. He knew that his presence on the sea-shore must be necessary, and he was anxious to join his friends. After two or three minutes' quietness, which the howling of the wind alone disturbed, he decided to break the painful silence, and called out in a loud, clear voice: "Who goes there?"

The ghost did not see fit to mention its name.

"Come forward, and tell me what you are here for!" repeated Cambremer.

Still no reply.

"I warn you," said the chevalier, stepping forward, "that if you do not reply, I shall fire at you."

This threat was emphasised by the sharp click of his pistol, which he held ready. It did not, however, persuade the night-prowler to explain himself, but it produced an unexpected effect. The white form left its place and came forward.

Cambremer had raised his pistol and kept it in readiness, but he did not fire, for he wished to see what the ghost would next do. It would be false to say that he felt no agitation, still he experienced no fear. The mysterious being now approaching played its part admirably as a denizen of a phantom world. It did not walk, but it glided along, and thus it is that ghosts invariably progress. The less distance there remained between it and Cambremer the more ready the latter became for a struggle, which he now believed to be inevitable.

All the advantage would be on his side, for he remained in the shade, and had even taken the precaution to change his place quietly, lest the sepulchral personage should fire at him. Chevalier Casse-Cou was no novice in perilous encounters, and had acquired a coolness that danger only increased. When he thought that the space between the enemy and himself had sufficiently diminished, he called out: "Stand where you are!"

He was anxious to see his adversary more closely, but he did not care to let him come near enough to touch him. The ghost obeyed his last injunction. It stopped short, and resumed its immobility, but remained as silent as the grave from which it seemed to have arisen.

The rays of the moon fell right upon it through a wide breach in the dilapidated ceiling of the hall. It was within ten paces of Cambremer, who could now examine every detail of its mortuary drapings. The inspection did not take him long. A long white covering, that was all that could be seen. Not a gesture, a motion, nor a sound.

"I warn you for the last time," called out Cambremer, "that if you do not answer me, I will kill you like a dog!"

Still silence and immobility prevailed.

"You think, perhaps, that I am not armed; you are mistaken; I have four bullets ready for you, and I'll wager that I shall not miss you."

The apparition seemed more stony than ever.

"You have a minute and a half to make up your mind. I will count up to a hundred, and, instead of saying one hundred and one, I shall fire!"

The threat which followed upon the three previous warnings was no more effective than the first one had been. There must be an end to all this, and Chevalier Casse-Cou began to count slowly, fully decided to fire as soon as he had come to the given number.

He had not entire confidence in the effect of his shot, for he remembered an old story about false coiners disguised as ghosts who had a secret for escaping the bullets fired at them by unwelcome visitors to a deserted castle. He therefore expected some such trickery as this, but in case of failing to shoot the pretended spectre he had made up his mind to attack it with the butt-end of his gun.

Things did not come to this point, however. At the moment when he uttered the word thirty-six, the mysterious being slowly raised its arm and began to thrust aside the shroud which fell in folds around it. The chevalier stopped counting, but did not draw back one inch. The unknown threw back the veil from its face, and the moonlight then fell upon its pale features. Cambremer uttered a hoarse cry, and his hair rose upon his head. He felt stupefied, and well he might be. The ghost, in unveiling itself, had disclosed the features of a woman, and in the dim light, he thought he beheld a face the recollection of which had never left him.

Beneath the folds of the white shroud shone two large black eyes, full of strange lustre; a pale face, around which there was a band of crape, peered forth, and the whole mournful figure recalled the poor woman who at the Odéon had fallen a victim to Bousenna.

Cambremer had scarcely seen her in the private-box at the theatre, but when dead, he had held her in his arms, and it now seemed to him that she had suddenly risen before him, paler and colder than on the night when she lay upon the faded sofa in the lobby. A mournful smile played upon her lips, and her cold, fixed eyes fascinated the imprudent and dismayed chevalier. He no longer thought of defending himself from diabolic trickery or of fighting spirits with bullets. All his resolution left him, and he felt fear—a horrible fear—at his very heart, paralyzing his movements as well as his will. His arm, which he had raised to fire, fell to his side, his sight grew dim, and his knees gave way under him. A child might have made him fall. And yet the phantom did not stir.

However overcome Cambremer might be, he still had time for the thought that a human being would not have failed to take advantage of his terror to fall upon him. Must he believe in the wanderings of the dead, and fly before the shade of the poor murdered woman?

While Francis thus hesitated and trembled, the spectre advanced and

extended its hand, then brought it quickly up again, as though to say : "Come !"

Then Baïa's protector forgot everything, the friends who awaited him upon the beach, the danger which he incurred in the smuggler's castle, and the traps that Bousenna might have prepared for him in these suspicious ruins. He only saw that the woman beckoned to him, and he went towards her.

But as he was about to take hold of her hand, the mysterious being, who signed to him, drew back, as a morning mist recedes before the sun. Cambremer tried to call out ; but his voice expired in his throat ; he tried to walk, and found that his limbs were weak.

The phantom had already retreated to the darkest part of the gallery, with the lightness of a shade. In ten seconds it had disappeared altogether.

This ghostly flitting produced a very happy effect upon Chevalier Casse-Cou. As long as the vision had stood before him he had thought and acted as though in another world. But when the flying figure had vanished, he resumed his self-possession, just as the bewitched beings of the Middle Ages resumed possession of their faculties when an exorciser had banished the fiend. He fought against the feelings that had mastered him, and compelled himself to obey his will.

His gun was in his way. He passed it over his shoulder, took his second pistol from his belt, and began the pursuit with a weapon in each hand. The gallery ended in a round hall. Cambremer entered it with a firm step, and again saw the white figure. It was standing upon the first step of a spiral stairway, and again signed to him to follow.

"I am coming," said Chevalier Casse-Cou, in a low tone.

The apparition then began to ascend with the same rapid and noiseless step as it had used in pacing the flagstones of the gallery.

The ascension reassured Cambremer completely. He had thought that the unknown being was about to go in an opposite direction, and descend to the lower part of the building and thence emerge from the château, unless, indeed, it entered the bowels of the earth. Since his adventure near the Barrière 'Enfer, he himself had not the slightest desire to enter the bowels of the earth, and he decidedly preferred the aerial regions.

So without the slightest hesitation he darted forward in the direction pointed out by the ghost. The tower in which this scene took place was not that where the notary had preferred to breakfast, but all towers are alike, and by dint of climbing one always finds one's self at last in the open air. The upper platform was isolated, for it was, at least, a hundred feet from the ground below, and once upon this spot, surrounded by space, Cambremer felt sure of seizing upon the ghost. He had almost forgotten, it must be confessed, his friends who were in ambush upon the beach, together with the sham coffin headed by the smugglers, the brig about to set sail for the Levant, and the storm that was raging,

When he had gone up twenty steps or so in pursuit of the veiled woman, the noise of the sea and the howling of the wind became terrific. The old tower shook, and there were moments when it seemed as though it bent like a tree in a whirlwind. As the chevalier went up the steps, he certainly deserved his glorious nickname of "Break-Neck," for the loosened slabs were far apart, and there was considerable danger of falling. These breaks in the granite ascent did not, however, prevent the spectre from going on. But the butt of Cambremer's gun knocked against the wall at every instant in

such a way that although he strode blindly on, at the risk of breaking his bones, he could scarcely keep up with the apparition. At last he even ceased to catch a glimpse of the shroud which but lately had trailed upon the stoues in sight of him.

It is true that the thick walls of the tower showed fewer openings, and that the pursuit was now going on in almost complete darkness. At length after five or six long minutes, during which he continued to ascend, Cambremer saw a light above his head. He redoubled his efforts. The platform could not be much higher up, and he longed to reach it, so as to find himself face to face with the phantom in the open air and the moonlight. On reaching the upper steps, however, he took the precaution to stop for a few seconds. The woman in white had disappeared, and he had a vague idea that a trap might await him here, for his reason had returned to him, and he now no longer believed in the resurrection of Baia's mother.

The being, whatever it might be, that resembled her, could not have vanished into space, and was certainly waiting for Casse-Cou to come out upon the upper terrace. It might even be hidden behind a little turret, which flanked the stairway at its top, and might strike at him as he appeared.

To escape this danger, Cambremer bent down and, with a leap, cleared the entire length of the platform. While he was executing this skilful manœuvre he heard a sharp sound behind him, which his ear detected above the noise of the storm. It was like the sound made by a door, violently closed. However this idea did but cross his mind, as he was anxious to assume a defensive position.

To do this he had to turn round, but, unfortunately, the rapidity of his progress had been such that he had rushed against the opposite parapet. He had bruised himself a little and, as he had not taken care to deaden the shock by extending his arms, he almost had a bad fall. Still he quickly recovered his equilibrium, turned round, and looked about. There was nothing to be seen.

Cambremer, when he found the platform deserted, at first thought that he had been the dupe of an illusion. It seemed materially impossible that a living being could have disappeared by melting into air like smoke in a high wind.

He began to rummage about in every corner of the small platform, which ended in a ruined parapet.

He at last finished doing so, and it became evident that the woman in white had not left the slightest trace of her passage. In compensation for this, however, Chevalier Casse-Cou made a most unexpected discovery.

The staircase by which he had ascended ended in a stone lobby which jutted out from the platform. It was in passing beyond the arch of this lobby that he had bent down and recklessly dashed onward, so that his spring had carried him much further than he had meant to go. But he had not had time to perceive that the passage had a door, which had been open when he had passed it, whereas now, to his profound surprise, it was closed. He then remembered the sharp sound which he had heard in coming up. It had been the noise either of a lock or bolt, for the door was now firmly closed in its stone frame-work. Cambremer looked for a knob, but could not find one, and then he began to rattle the door, which resisted all his efforts. Had the wind closed it? The gale blew hard enough to accomplish such a feat, but the fact that the door had closed at the very moment when the chevalier reached the platform was certainly strange.

On the other hand, how could the mysterious being who had thus vanished have disappeared so quickly? To kick a door to, or to slam it, and instantaneously disappear from a narrow space surrounded by emptiness, so to speak, would not be an easy feat for the best gymnast. Still less could it be easily accomplished by a woman wrapped in the long folds of a white sheet. Besides, where had she gone? By what miracle had she been able to leave the top of a tower the walls of which possessed no outer stairway save such as was afforded by some ancient ivy?

Cambremer popped out his head and looked over the parapet. There was nothing to be seen. The moon was shining brightly enough to reveal any form suspended between heaven and earth. It must then be supposed that the fugitive had already had time to reach the ground. Now, the great court-yard of the château was there below, fully exposed to view and it was quite deserted. Towards the sea, moreover, the eye took in a range of sandy hills, but no human form was visible.

A less courageous man than Chevalier Casse-Cou would now have begun to believe that he had seen a ghost; but Cambremer had dismissed the thought, and felt perfectly sure that he had met with some female accomplice of Bousenna's. He suspected that it might be Yamina. The vile creature with the black pin, who had once played the part of the young man with the red flower, might, to serve the needs of the smuggler's cause, have assumed the disguise of a ghost. In the dim light of the gallery, her pale face and large black eyes had produced the illusion which had deceived the chevalier. The features of the creature's face vaguely recalled those of the poor dead woman, a Mauresque like herself, and, at dead of night, it was easy to make a mistake. Everything could thus be accounted for excepting the incredible disappearance of the sham ghost. Where could it now be?

The aim of inducing him to ascend the tower was apparent to Cambremer, now that he found himself shut off upon the platform. The phantom had wished to keep him from following the party of smugglers who were quietly proceeding towards the sea with their treasures.

He was certainly somewhat surprised that no attempt had been made to kill him; but Bousenna, since missing his aim with the notary, must be anxious to reach the brig so as to place his plunder as well as his person in safety. His treasury was no doubt full, thanks to his smuggling operations, and if it merely contained the fortune of which Paul Vernier had been deprived, it was well worth saving.

After all these reflections, the chevalier felt somewhat re-assured, for he knew that the departure of the smugglers could not be effected without a struggle. M. Allanic and Cassonade must be on the watch upon the shore, and Leguern had undoubtedly been able to join them. They would be able to cope with four or five rascals, however determined these might be. Still, Cambremer felt extremely angry with himself at the thought that one gun the more might be of great use in the struggle that would take place.

Urged by his feelings he began to walk up and down the platform like a lion in his cage, and in passing the parapet he suddenly caught sight of an exit which he had not at first seen, careful as had been his search.

Near the turret which hid the staircase there was an opening like that of a chimney-pipe, in the wall of the tower.

This opening no doubt extended to the ground or to one of the great fire-places below and its dimensions would allow a person to glide down it unless of too stout a figure. However unlikely it might appear, it must

now be admitted that the ghost had taken this route, which was as narrow as it was unpleasant.

In order the better to assure himself of this point, Cambremer leaned over the aperture and saw that the tunnel was provided with iron climbing-spurs which might be used in ascending or descending by any skilful active person. This was a road that seemed best suited to a chimney-sweep, it is true, but it must have formerly served for private communication between the different storeys of the tower, and it probably led to some secret hiding-place concealed in the thickness of the walls.

A descent by this flue was the kind of feat to tempt Chevalier Casse-Cou, who would have tried a still more dangerous pathway in view of joining his friends. But while he was looking at the hole studying the position of the rounds upon which it would be necessary for him to place his feet, he felt a sharp pain on his cheek.

He drew quickly back as he heard a shot and then carried his hand to his face, which was tinged with blood. He now understood what had taken place. A bullet had been fired from the depths of the flue, and had grazed his cheek. The flue was inhabited.

XIV.

IN WHICH A NOTARY AND A GROCER TAKE A WALK BY NIGHT.

WHILE Cambremer, shut off at the top of the tower, was in despair at his forced inactivity, the warlike notary was seeking other adventures. Before nightfall he had left the ruins of Susicinio with Cassonade, and the manœuvring in which he now indulged evinced unusual knowledge of strategy.

Instead of going openly towards the beach, he began by walking round the château, like a man bent upon showing a stranger the curiosities of the place. With the prudence which he had learned in the practise of the legal profession, he went quietly over the sandhills amid which the old feudal pile rose up, and he took care to stop every now and then and gesticulate like an antiquarian explaining to a novice the use of barbicans and drawbridges.

This pantomime had no other aim than to establish the innocence of his intentions. M. Allanic feared that some smuggler might be on the watch, hidden behind some battlement, and he wished to convince M. Bousenna's spies that the Parisians had come to visit Susicinio simply as sight-seers. Cassonade answered him very aptly, raised his hands admiringly, and even went so far as to approach the walls, as if trying to read the heraldic inscriptions in the granite.

After a full half hour of this performance, the notary proceeded with his companion toward the village of Sarzeau, turning his back to the shore, where he really intended to hide himself, and sending an occasional shot after such birds as rose up.

"If we are watched," said he, to the faithful squire, "the spy will lose his time, for I defy him to find out what we came here for."

They walked on in an opposite direction to that which they intended to take later on, until night had come, and it was only then that M. Allanic seated himself behind a sand-bank which, even if it had not been dark,

would have well sufficed to hide them. A partisan chief could not have led a detachment more skilfully to surprise the enemy.

It is true that the lawyer of Vannes had some guerrilla blood in his veins, and in Morbihan, moreover, the instinct of fighting in ambush is born with the natives.

"We must begin by taking something to drink," said M. Allanic, holding out his flask to Cassonade, who did not need entreating to take a full share of old rum from it.

"Ah ! that does me good," said Pétronille's husband ; " it is better than the ' three-six ' that I used to sell in the Rue Férou."

" Yes, it is not hard to swallow. I bought it last month of a coaster who came from England."

" Ah ! how do we know ? It may have been smuggled in by Bousenna himself."

" That would not surprise me in the least. But what does that matter to us ?"

" We shall be all the stronger when we fight those chaps."

" You are quite ready for the fray, I see, and I can rely upon you."

" Just as you might rely on some old trooper, although I have always been a mere grocer ; still there's one thing that I don't like."

" What's that ?"

" The feeling that Monsieur Francis is all alone in that old barracks where I would not leave a dog. If anything happened to him, I should never get over it."

" Where he is he's safer than we are," said the notary, quietly.

" Never mind ; I should have preferred to bring him with us. I have a dread of parting from him. Every time that we have worked against that rascal Bousenna separately, we have come to grief."

" It won't be so to-night ; I'll answer for that ; and, besides, if my calculations are correct, Monsieur Cambremer will soon join us."

" Humph !" muttered Cassonade, " you have made him sentinel, and he's not a man to leave his post."

" Let me alone, and all will go well," said M. Allanic, rising up to resume his walk.

" It seems that the dance is about to begin," replied the brave squire, setting his gun upon his shoulder again.

" Oh, not yet ; but it is time for us to take our places."

Having thus spoken, the notary placed himself at the head of the file, and Cassonade unhesitatingly followed. The road which the two friends took was not a very convenient one. It turned and twisted over the sand-hills, and at every step one's feet sank into the sand, progress thus being impeded.

A stranger would have been puzzled how to direct his steps among the labyrinth of broom-covered hillocks. But the notary went on as quietly as though he had been walking in the streets of Vannes, and this although the night was somewhat dark, for the moon which had just risen was not yet high in the heavens.

As they drew near the shore, the wind became keener, and it was evident that a fierce storm was about to break forth. Cassonade showed his courage. He went on, with his head down and his shoulders up, without complaining or questioning his leader. It must be confessed, however, that M. Allanic had not given him the slightest idea as to the spot where he was bound.

After three quarters of an hour spent in somewhat painful efforts, they

began to climb a bare hillock, which seemed to be the last of the rises. When they reached the summit of this mound, Cassonade came near losing his hat in the gale.

"What outrageous weather!" he growled. "It never blew like this even at the top of the Buttes Montmartre."

"It will be much worse presently," said the notary; "but our hiding-place is not far off."

A low hut was now visible about twenty paces to the left, and five minutes later the two men came to it. This building had formerly been used as a guard-house, it would appear, but only its four walls were standing. The door and roof had vanished long before, still, such as it was, the ruin offered a very acceptable shelter.

The notary went in with his companion, put his gun in one corner, and bade Cassonade sit down beside him on a pile of stones which constituted the remains of a furnace where bullets had been cast in the time of the wars with the English.

"And now, what shall we do?" asked the squire, eager for action.

"Now," said M. Allanic, quietly, "we are on the watch, and we must wait till the game comes within gun-shot."

"What! do you think that M. Bousenna will come within reach of our guns?"

"I am sure of it, and if you wish to have any proof of it, you have only to look out to sea."

Cassonade strained his eyes in the attempt, but could distinguish nothing. The furious waves beat upon the shore at fifty feet from the ruined house, and only the white foam could be seen afar against the dark sky.

"The brig is over there," said the notary, pointing to the horizon.

Cassonade shaded his eyes with his hand and concentrated all his powers of vision upon the point indicated. He had been trying for a full minute to see the suspicious brig when the notary suddenly sprang up, saying:

"The devil! that is very strange!"

M. Allanic must have seen something very extraordinary, for he had quitted the protecting shelter of the ruined hut to step outside. Cassonade followed him, and began to look about in every direction. An inspection was not an easy matter in the profound obscurity and with a wind that blew in one's face and stung one's eyes. Thus the ex-grocer saw nothing but a fringe of white foam marking the limit where the waves broke upon the shore. But suddenly the notary pressed his arm, and said to him in an eager tone:

"Look over there, on the right, at the point!"

What M. Allanic called the "point" was a mass of rock, which overhung the shore and jutted out into the sea. But it was not this cloud-capped cape that occupied M. Allanic's attention so much as something upon it. By dint of careful scrutiny, Cassonade ended by distinguishing a light.

"Look, look, look!" said he, with a different intonation to every syllable.

"Well, what do you think of that discovery?"

"I don't know what to think. Perhaps it is a signal for the boat to come to shore."

"No," said the notary.

"Can Bousenna and his gang be already at their post on the shore?"

"Impossible! The brig is still full three miles from the coast, and the

smugglers are not so imprudent as to leave their hiding-place before the right moment."

"Perhaps Leguern has landed?"

"Leguern must have arrived and put his boat under shelter near the point; but he knows that his orders are not to land till he hears three shots fired."

"Ah! I have it," exclaimed Cassonade; "it must be a squad of officers going their rounds."

"It is clear that you have just come from Paris, my friend. If you belonged to our country, you would know that the service on the coast is not like that at the *Barrière de Bercy*. At this hour and in this weather, the head-officer is sitting by his fireside, and the two or three men who are on duty for the night in the environs will take good care to keep out of any of the holes in the rocks."

"Well, then, I give it up!"

"So do I, unless the—but no—the men of Sarzeau would not do that."

Cassonade did not understand the meaning of these incoherent words, and he was, besides, absorbed in the contemplation of the phenomenon on the point.

"It is strange!" said he, "but that light dances about like a will-o'-the-wisp."

Indeed, the light which gleamed amid the darkness did not remain in place for a moment. It waved up and down, and changed its position with a regular and continuous movement. It seemed like a street lamp swinging upon a rope.

"One would think that it was a light held in somebody's hand," muttered the notary, as though talking to himself.

"Yes, but by whom the devil only knows!"

"The thing that annoys me is that we shall have a very inconvenient witness there."

"Is that the place where Bousenna will come?"

"No; he can only come to the little creek on our left, but the man who is at the point yonder must be there with bad intentions, and I should be glad to get rid of him."

"I see but one way of sending him off."

"What way is that?"

"To go quietly up to him over the rocks beyond which he is perched. With such a wind as this he will not hear us coming, and we can catch hold of him and wring his neck, if you like."

The notary did not evince any haste to reply. He looked at the sky, consulted the fine repeater which he had bought on his last journey to Paris, and smote his brow as if trying to evoke an idea from his brain.

"You are right, perhaps," said he, after a pause; "it is not very late, and I think that we shall have time to go after him before our rascals reach the shore."

"Let us go at once, then!" exclaimed Cassonade, who was always ready for anything.

"I am only afraid that you will find it hard work following me over the rocks. It is very dark, and granite is slippery when wet."

"Bah! I have been in worse places, when I used to look for crows in the quarries of Chaumont, for example."

"Well, I will go ahead and tell you where to set your feet."

"Don't be alarmed; I can climb like a cat, and I never feel giddy."

M. Allanic said no more. He took up his gun which he had set aside, and began to go down the shore. The hillocks, amid which stood the little ruined building which had sheltered the two friends, ran out on the left to a kind of cutting which formed a somewhat wide pathway. This natural passage served for those who lived along the shore, when they came with their carts to gather sea-weed. It conducted to a little creek where the water was very shallow, and which allowed of easy landing. It might be supposed that the expedition headed by Bousenna would repair there.

On the right, on the contrary, the mounds of sand which overlooked the shore extended as far as a cluster of steep rocks which ran out into the sea like a gigantic spur.

It was here that the suspicious light was being waved about.

The notary showed Cassonade the way, taking him along a narrow stretch of beach which the waves had left uncovered. The first part of the route was not so bad. It was merely necessary to keep back from the waves, which broke angrily over the flat beach, and threatened to carry off any imprudent being who neglected to keep close to the sandhills. Thus, Casse-Cou's friends were only badly splashed when they arrived at the foot of the great rocks.

The notary, like a good sportsman, had taken care to keep his flint dry by holding it under his arm, and Cassonade, cautioned by him, had done the same.

They now began to ascend the promontory.

M. Allanic had not exaggerated matters in saying that it would be extremely difficult to climb to the summit. They had to mount up a veritable wall, broken, it is true, by irregularities which might be used as supports, but covered with sea-weed, which did not furnish a reliable hold. The notary, however, went up with a dexterity that long practice had assured. He did not set his foot down till he had tested each spot with his hand, and every time he secured a good hold, he took care to hold out the butt of his gun to Cassonade to help him to mount.

After ten minutes spent in somewhat painful exertion, they both of them reached the top without mishap. At the moment when they arrived on the irregular platform capping the rocks, the light was to be seen shining at fifty paces from them, but immediately afterwards it disappeared.

"The devil! we must have been seen," muttered Cassonade.

M. Allanic did not listen to him. He was looking earnestly at the sea, which was covered with white foam.

"Great heavens!" he exclaimed, suddenly; "our boat is running right upon the point. Leguern will be lost!"

Cassonade lacked a sailor's eye, and he looked at the sea in vain; he could not distinguish anything. However, as he was always anxious to learn what he could, he did not fail to question the notary.

"How do you know that it is old Leguern's boat?" asked he.

"It is the only one that could stand such weather and make for the shore."

"There is the smugglers' boat, you know; perhaps the one you see is that."

"No; the brig is far away. I do not see it now; and this boat is not like it at all."

"At night-time all boats look alike!" muttered Cassonade, who had never been in a boat except upon the Seine.

"I tell you that a child would know it," retorted M. Allanic, earnestly.

"It is Leguern's bark, and he is running upon the rocks; in half an hour he will be in the midst of the eddy!"

"This is strange! How can a man who knows the sea so well make a mistake like that?"

"Upon my word, I should like to see you in a gale that would blow the horns off a bull's head, and with a tide that is coming in at the rate of ten knots an hour!"

"Never mind," said the ex-grocer of the Rue Férou, obstinately, "it is just the same as if my friend Pierre Morillon went into the Passage de l'Opéra with his cab, instead of following the Boulevard des Italiens."

"The Boulevard is nothing like the Peninsula of Rhuis," replied the notary, sharply. "It is my fault, too," said he, despairingly; "I ought to have told him to keep out at sea if the weather became too bad."

"Can't we call out to him to beware of driving ahead?" exclaimed Cassonade, who seemed to cling to his comparison of the boat to a cab.

"Ah! now he seems to be going up a little," said M. Allanic, pointing to a spot which the squire could not see.

"It seems that the drawing up of marriage contracts does not injure a man's eyes," remarked the ex-grocer. "Now I could not see the towers of Notre Dame on such a night as this, even if they were close to my nose."

"If he would only double the point!" resumed the notary, without listening to the Parisian's absurdities, "he would then be under cover and could anchor, as was agreed upon, in the Susicinio creek."

"I have an idea that that is exactly what he is trying to do, and that we should do as well to go there and wait for him, firing our three shots."

"Well, a good sailor like Leguern cannot make such a mistake," said the lawyer. "It must be that he has some reason that I do not realise for running right upon the pebbly shore, for he is acquainted with the coast hereabouts as well as I am acquainted with the Rue des Chanoines at Vannes."

"By the bye, what has become of our light?"

"The light!" repeated M. Allanic. "Ah! I had forgotten about it. Yes, it is there. Ah! the wretches!"

This conversation had taken place at the top of the rocks, and the extreme point of the projection was still at some distance from the two speakers. It was precisely here that the light had suddenly ceased to shine.

"Let us run!" exclaimed the notary; "we shall perhaps arrive in time."

And he darted ahead as fast as he could go over the dangerous steep. This time his hurry made him forget to help his inexperienced companion, and he soon distanced him.

Left to his own resources, Cassonade was unable to compete with a native of Brittany in going over such ground; but he was not a man to give up the attempt. He tried to spring over the breaks which constantly occurred in the rocks, and to avoid the rough projections upon their surface. It was a regular steeplechase, and with his gun slung across his back and his arms extended to enable him to keep his balance, Cassonade looked not unlike an English clown in a circus.

He several times came very near falling into a hole, and breaking his bones upon the sharp stones. Still, by the best luck imaginable, he succeeded in passing over all obstacles, and joined his friend the notary unhurt.

M. Allanic had not stopped till he reached the extreme end of the pro-

montory. A step further, and he would have fallen into the sea, which was forty feet below.

The spot where he halted was very perilous on account of the high wind, but he now took the precaution to lie down, and his head only projected over the edge of the platform. Cassonade thought it best to imitate him. He lay down quietly beside him, and began to look at what was going on below.

The observatory chosen by M. Allanic was not a very convenient one, it must be said. The wind was raging, and the sea dashing against the rocks with the impetuosity of a whirlwind, and a noise like the roaring of powerful cannon.

The front of the rock was not quite perpendicular. It had various projections, looking like a huge staircase gradually sloping to the level of the sea, and just below the two friends, and upon the lower step of this steep stairway, there was a human form. The unknown being who had perched himself there, like a sea-gull on a rock, held in his hand a lighted lantern, which he waved up and down.

Our friends had found their will-o'-the-wisp again.

The individual who was thus entertaining himself could hardly be distinguished on account of the position in which he stood. M. Allanic and Cassonade perceived him from above, and the night being dark, and the light of the lantern being turned towards the sea, his person remained in the shade, and was seen in such a way as to appear shorter than it had looked before. Cassonade, especially, did not know what to think, and he came near asking the notary aloud for an explanation. But seeing that his companion remained silent and motionless, he understood that his cue was to be silent also, and he simply nudged his arm to show that he was near.

M. Allanic replied by pressing his hand, as if to say, "Do not stir! The time has come!"

He seemed, besides, to be much more interested in the signalling executed below him than in the living semaphore.

Cassonade imitated him. He raised his head without altering his position, which, by-the-bye, made him feel a pain in the neck, and he tried to peer through the darkness which enveloped the grand spectacle of the ocean in its rage. His eyes were already more capable of utilising the dim light afforded by the veiled moon which was struggling to pierce the clouds, and he was at last able to distinguish the main objects in the dim distance.

The first and the more striking of two points which drew his attention was distinctly defined against the white foam with which the promontory was surrounded. It was a little boat, a veritable nutshell, which sometimes rose on the top of a wave, and then again sunk down between two walls of foam.

Grocer though he was, Cassonade understood that old Leguern must be in this boat. He even concluded from the direction that it followed that the old tar had realised his danger, and was endeavouring to double the point without running against the rocks.

Delighted with this idea, Pétronille's husband now looked further ahead, and saw a large vessel coming near. It seemed to be making direct for the shore, for it grew more and more distinct, and its hull sometimes rose high out of the water. Meanwhile, the fellow upon the ledge of rock below continued his evolutions, raising and lowering his lantern with mechanical regularity. However, Cassonade's sagacity did not go so far as to enable him to understand the aim of this strange manœuvring.

He was not without some belief in a good motive on the part of the individual making these signals ; who might, perhaps, be simply supplying the place of the missing lighthouses along the Morbihan coast.

The notary's silence and stillness favoured this fancy, and he mentally blessed the generous citizen who had left his bed at night-time, and in a storm, to help his fellow-creatures. However, after some little time spent in thought, he felt M. Allanic's hand pulling at his sleeve, as if to draw him back. The squire had resolved that he would implicitly obey his new director, whose orders were as sacred to him as those of Chevalier Cassenade. So he yielded to the backward movement, and dragged himself, though not without scratching his hands and knees, to a sunken place in the rock.

When there, the notary assumed a less fatiguing position, and the two friends seated themselves side by side. The wind blew great guns, as a sailor would say ; it came from the open sea, and they could speak without danger of being heard by the fellow with the lantern.

"Did you see?" asked M. Allanic.

"See what? Leguern's boat and the smugglers' brig? Yes, certainly," said Cassenade, proud of having such sharp eyes.

"Do you know what is going to happen now?"

"It seems to me that they are going to land," said the squire, with as much certainty as though a question had been asked him about the boats that unload a cargo of apples on the Quai Saint Bernard.

"They will run upon the rocks, and ten minutes after they do so, they will be dashed to pieces by the waves."

"So much the better!" exclaimed Cassenade, "the rascally smugglers will get their fill of water, and Bousenna will not be able to escape."

"Yes; but what of Leguern?"

"What! do you think that he also—no, it is impossible? I'm no sailor, but I thought that he passed those great black rocks that project out of the water without touching them at all."

"Listen to me," said the notary in Cassenade's ear, so that not a word should be lost, "Leguern had lost his bearings, and I will tell you how by-and-bye, but he has seen his danger, and I saw just now that he was steering with great skill and courage to reach the open sea. It is doubtful whether he will be able to do so, for he did not see his mistake till late; but his life is in the hands of heaven, and we are powerless to help him!"

"Ah! if I could only do so by leaping into the sea," said Cassenade, "I would do it; but with the waves so wild, it would be idle to attempt it!"

"The brig with Bousenna's gang is not very near the coast, and we can prevent it from being wrecked," resumed M. Allanic.

"I do not understand you at all!" exclaimed the grocer.

"You will if you listen. Do you know what that fellow is doing with the lantern?"

"He is trying to save the brig, of course."

"No! he is trying to draw it upon the rocks, and is moving his light up and down for no other motive."

"That's impossible!"

"Oh! it is not the first time, unfortunately, that this has been done on the coast of Brittany. There are people among us cruel enough to despoil a shipwrecked vessel and its crew. It has been done ever since the time of the Druids."

Cassonade knew little of the history of Armorica, and he did not care a straw about the Druids; but he did wish to know how the person on the rock could wreck a ship.

"That man, by waving his lantern, imitates the pitching and rolling of a vessel," said the notary, "so that a ship in distress is led to follow, the sailors believing that there is a vessel ahead of them, and that they can steer that way without danger."

"I understand now," said the squire. "Well, what shall we do?"

"I drew you over this way to ask your advice on the subject."

"The deuce you did," muttered Cassonade.

"If we stop the wretch who is holding the lantern, we may, perhaps, prevent the brig from being wrecked."

"Well, as for the scoundrels on board—" began Cassonade.

"They are human beings," said M. Allanic, in a firm tone.

Cassonade's goodness of heart was never appealed to in vain, and the notary had no difficulty in winning the cause, which he pleaded in the name of humanity.

"After all," said the squire, "Bousenna is not aboard."

"And I hope that we shall be able to catch him all the same."

"A good action is always rewarded," rejoined the grocer. "Come, tell me what to do."

M. Allanic was already standing up. "It is a very simple thing," said he; "we will fall upon the rascal with the lantern, and between us we can master him."

"I'm willing," said Cassonade; "but who the mischief can he be?"

"Are you ready?" asked M. Allanic.

"I'll wring his neck, if there's no other way," retorted the squire.

"That's not necessary, especially at the outset. The main thing is to put out his light."

"How shall we do that?"

"Do as you see me do."

Cassonade did not need to be told twice. He began to walk along beside the notary, and they both reached the verge of the rock at the same time.

The distance between them and the treacherous wrecker was only a few feet, and the lower shelf was wide enough to enable them to descend in safety. The two friends leaped down with a simultaneous movement, and measured the distance so well that they both caught the signal-maker by the collar at once.

Finding himself in the grip of men who seemed to have fallen from the skies, the wrecker, who appeared to be very young and short, was so greatly frightened that he let fall his light, which was immediately extinguished, for the glass of the lantern was broken by the fall, and besides, the wind would have blown out even a gas lamp.

"Mercy, good gentlemen!" cried the stranger, in a piteous tone.

"Aha! I've heard that piping voice before!" said Cassonade.

M. Allanic was giving his prisoner a good shaking, and he no doubt also recognized the shrill voice that rose above the noise of the tempest, for he exclaimed, "What, is it you, you good-for-nothing rascal?"

This appellation was enough to convince Cassonade that he had not been mistaken, and, indeed, he scarcely needed to look to recognize the young vagabond whom they had found at Sarzeau. The little scoundrel was trembling all over, and he seemed to be trying to squeeze into the wall of rock against which the notary's strong hand had pinned him.

"So that's the way you do my errands, you young hound!" cried M. Allanic, holding him tighter than ever.

"I lost your basket," replied the boy, in a whining tone.

"Ah! you can speak French now, can you?"

"I told you so!" exclaimed Cassonade. "I knew that he was not a Breton."

"Come now, speak up; and if you lie I shall send you to feed the crabs. Who sent you here?"

"Nobody, sir."

"Confess that you are in the pay of the Suscinio smugglers!"

"If you wish it, I'll tell you where they are," exclaimed the boy, wild with fear.

"I know where they are as well as you do; and I'll make you go ahead when I deal with them, by and by, and just look out for yourself if you play us false!"

"I no longer see the two boats, sir," now interrupted Cassonade.

These words reminded M. Allanic of the terrible situation of his friend Leguern.

"Lie down there!" said he to the boy, "and if you dare to run away, I'll break your head!"

The vagabond obeyed, and remained quiet.

"What vessel was that which you were trying to draw upon the rocks?"

"A brig with a fine cargo of merchandise."

"Then you hoped to get your share?"

"The people along the coast here have a right to their share."

"You do not belong to Sarzeau, then?"

"No; I'm from the Isle of Batz."

"So much the better. I should not like to have such vermin as you for a fellow-countryman."

"I hear a cry down there, sir—ahead of us!" said Cassonade.

"Leguern must have doubled the point," muttered M. Allanic, "and the brig cannot be near enough to hail us."

The moon was hidden by a heavy black cloud, and there was no light whatever. In the dense darkness that now overspread the sea and sky, there was no possibility of seeing anything, and it was impossible to tell what had become of the two boats. The notary made a trumpet of his hands, and listened attentively. Through the howling of the west wind, and the roaring of the breakers, he thought he heard a clearer sound. It seemed like the ringing of a bell; and at intervals, a whistling noise seemed to rise above the raging of the storm.

"That is a sea-gull's cry," said M. Allanic.

"A man's voice could not be heard in such a din as this," said Cassonade.

"But if Leguern's boat had cleared the point, we ought to see it. There would be a black speck in the creek on our left."

The squire made a strong effort to see, and stared in the direction indicated. "Good heavens!" he exclaimed, all at once.

"What is the matter?"

"There's another will-o'-the-wisp!"

A light had, indeed, appeared lower down the coast, only it was motionless.

"It's not the only one," resumed Cassonade, "there's another, and over there still another."

"I see; this time it is Bousenna and his gang who are making the signal agreed upon to show the pass to the brig which they are expecting."

"They've taken their time about it."

"That may be; but we've no time to lose if we wish to catch them."

"Let us tie this boy, so that he cannot escape, and then we will go on. My gun will get rusty if we stay here."

In order to hear one another, Allanic and Cassonade were obliged to shout out at the top of their voices, and they had not been able to hear what was going on out at sea.

Suddenly a loud noise made them turn their heads. They just espied a black mass which was scarcely discernible in the darkness, but which was spinning about amid the waves. Then a monstrous breaker uprose like a mountain and beat upon the rocks. All had vanished in a few seconds' time. A ship had struck upon the rocks, and been swallowed up before the spectators of the catastrophe could tell whether it was Leguern's boat or the smugglers' brig that had sunk.

Cassonade could not look quietly upon this frightful shipwreck, and he darted forward without stopping to think. The perilous leap he took might have had a fatal result, for he had descended eight or ten feet in the dark. But there is a Providence for those who are generously imprudent, and the reckless squire reached the base of the rock unharmed.

"Where are you going?" called out M. Allanic.

"To help them if I can," replied Cassonade, who had run towards the sea as nimbly as a mountain-goat.

The daring notary was not unwilling to follow him, and the thought that his old friend Leguern was perhaps drowning, fifty paces away, was a bitter one indeed. However, M. Allanic was too well acquainted with the storms of his native province to believe that a wrecked seaman, whoever he was, had the slightest chance of being rescued. A man would have been dashed to atoms a dozen times before he could obtain a footing on the sharp stones, and the sea rushed in so wildly that no human power could hold out against it.

All was useless, and yet M. Allanic would have made the attempt with Cassonade had he not been obliged to hold on to the little vagabond beside him. It would not do to drag him to the verge of the ledge, for the rascal knew the danger of the descent, and would certainly resist with all his might. On the other hand, if he was left alone for an instant, he would evidently take advantage of his liberty to effect his escape.

Bousenna and his gang must have reached the beach, and there was nothing to prevent the young spy from going to warn them. The notary, therefore, controlled the impulse which led him to imitate his companion, and resigned himself, in the interest of one and all, to remain still. "Come back, I beg of you!" he called out at the top of his voice; but Cassonade was already far off, and the wind bore the cry away.

M. Allanic wisely concluded that his companion would soon see the futility of his efforts, and that it would be best to wait for his return.

Meanwhile the lad had risen up, and he was looking towards the lights which shone upon the coast. It was evident that he was aware that the smugglers had arrived, and that he was only waiting for a good chance to slip off. The notary made a few forcible remarks to him in Celtic, to the effect that at the first attempt at escape he would favour him with a broken head, and on hearing this the young scamp concluded to keep quiet.

Meantime, Cassonade was continuing his perilous progress, and by hold-

ing on with hands and feet, he managed to get down to the level of the sea. When there, he caught hold of a rock which stood out like a great post in the midst of the dangerous projections about him, and, thanks to this support, he could peer into the abyss without being borne away. The grocer had never before seen such a sight as that which was now presented to his view. The waves leaped high and looked like a herd of wild elephants as they dashed up against the rocks, covering them with foam. It seemed as though the raging sea had risen to storm Armorica itself. The hideous concert was one in which the wind had more than its share, and it almost deafened Cassonade who was, moreover, half blinded by the spray that dashed into his face, so that he could not distinguish anything with certainty amid the confusion about him. Not a fragment of the ship was afloat. The sea had dashed it to pieces at once, and those aboard had not seen one another perish.

Cassonade realized his own powerlessness in presence of that terrible enemy, the ocean. Any attempt would have failed to save the unfortunates whom the waves had borne away. Even had any one belonging to the crew risen to the surface, the grocer could not have saved him, so he regretfully made up his mind to go back, and returned with a deal of trouble to the place where his companion stood.

"You did not see any one, did you?" asked M. Allanic, when they again found themselves side by side on the ledge of rock.

"No, it is worse than hell down there, and I came near falling over."

"If you had listened to me, we should not have lost all this time. Now we must make up for it."

"We are going to fall upon Bousenna, are we not?"

"The time has come; but we must be careful."

"Tell me what to do, and I shall be as docile as a soldier under his officer's orders."

M. Allanic now began to climb to the upper platform, and as soon as he reached it he called out to his friend to pass the lad up to him. The little vagabond allowed Cassonade to raise him up, and the grocer followed.

"We will go back by the way we came," said the notary. "By keeping among the sand-hills we shall incur less risk of being seen than if we followed the beach."

The three lights were still shining on the shore, but the darkness was complete on the open sea. After some moments spent in walking on, at first with difficulty, and then with less trouble when they reached the sand-hills, the two friends reached the ruin which they had left an hour before to follow the lantern.

The young scoundrel who had caused the frightful disaster did not make the least attempt to escape. His guardians, it is true, kept very close to him; but they did not have to suppress any attempt at rebellion. The scamp seemed to have resigned himself, and if there had been light enough to read his face, it would have shown a determination to act as was most likely to prove of benefit to him.

M. Allanic urged him on toward the ruined hut, and, taking a piece of fine cord from his pocket, he tied him securely to a post that stood in one corner.

"I shall be sure now that he won't play us any tricks," said he, as he did this with the dexterity of a sailor, making a firm knot as he finished.

"We might have saved ourselves the trouble of bringing him with us by tying him to the rocks down there," remarked Cassonade.

"That would have been impossible ; the stones are as slippery as though they had been polished, whereas here the place seems to have been made for a prison, and we can go out and look about us without fear of his escape."

"What if he calls out to warn the smugglers?"

"He wouldn't be heard ; however, I will gag him for safety's sake."

The notary took a large handkerchief from his pocket, and was about to tie it before the prisoner's mouth when the youngster said to him: "There's no use in that, my good sir ; I'd rather stay with you than with that Bedouin, who is always kicking me about."

"Aha !" said M. Allanic, "then you confess that you know him?"

"Yes ; and if you will promise not to hand me over to the police, I'll tell you all that you don't know."

"If I could feel sure that you won't lie, I might do so, but—"

"You would have plenty of time to denounce me to-morrow, if I deceived you to-night. In the first place, I cannot go back to the smugglers after playing them a trick."

"What trick?"

"Eh ! eh !" laughed the horrible imp, "I wrecked their vessel for them."

"Then that was their brig which has just sunk at the point?"

"Course it was ; did you think that I should have taken all that trouble for the paltry little boat that brought you from Sarzeau?"

"You young wretch !" exclaimed M. Allanic ; "then it was to pick up boards and broken hogsheads that you came all the way to Sarzeau?"

"Oh, not a bit of it ! There were some fine English goods aboard of the brig, and to-morrow when the wind lulls, and the sea goes out, the crates will come up. But for that, instead of going to the point, I should have waited for the Bedouin to get him to give me the sixty francs that he promised me."

The notary said nothing. He concluded that this was no time to preach to the precocious young villain, and that it would be better to endeavour to profit by his information.

"Listen," said he, in a tone that did not admit of reply, "I know as much as you do about the gang of smugglers, and I shall soon see whether you are telling me the truth. How long have they been at Suscinio?"

"The captain arrived last week with his wife ; the others came long before."

"Then he has a wife, it seems?"

"Yes, a Moorish woman, who is as cruel as he is himself."

"I thought so !" exclaimed Cassonade.

"It is Yamina !" muttered M. Allanic.

"I have only known them this winter," resumed the lad ; "I used to beg before, and once, when I was going past the Chênaie Etêtée, down there, near the coast at Trevinec, they offered me a mug of cider and three loaves of buckwheat bread if I would stay near the coast to warn them when the coast-guards came along."

"And since that time you have been in their service?"

"Yes, and I know all they do."

"Then you know that they were going to sail to-night?"

"That was why the Bedouin promised me the sixty francs ; he wanted me to watch the coast ; they must be at the cutting now, waiting for me."

"What if I give you double the money?"

"What would you expect me to do for it?"

"Go and tell them that you haven't seen anybody, and that they can come on. I shall follow you closely, and if I see them make off, I shall send my first bullet into you."

"That is not what I'm afraid of, but I don't want to go, all the same."

"Why not?"

"Because the captain might suspect me, as I have not done what I agreed to do, and he would kill me like a dog."

"What did you agree to do?"

"To signal to them when the brig had doubled the point at Bocaven, and when I felt sure that the custom-house officers were not near by."

"What was the signal?"

"A cry like that of a screech-owl."

"Then that must have been what we heard when we went into that good-for-nothing château over there!" exclaimed Cassonade.

"Yes; there was one of them watching on the top of the big tower."

"Then he must have seen us go away."

"You may be sure of that; and they must know very well that your friend did not leave the château."

"You are making fun of us. How could you have spoken to the captain, when you went away before we did, and have not left us since I sent you to Sarzeau?"

"It had all been arranged two days past. I was prowling about here all last night; but I met the watch from the custom-house, and I went to tell them not to come out. Besides, the weather was too clear; but to-night they meant to risk making the attempt."

"Good! Where are they now? I don't see their lights any longer."

"You cannot see them from here, because they are under shelter in the cutting that runs along by the Suscinio road; but if I call out to them they'll soon show their noses."

"Very well, then; you must call them."

"Shall I have the money if I do?"

"As sure as my name is Yves Allanic, and as sure as you'll be sent to prison to-morrow if you don't go on right."

"Swear it, then, by Saint Anne of Auray!"

The notary hesitated for a moment. It seemed to him wrong to bring the name of the patron saint of his country into such a matter. He swore, however, for there was no time to lose.

"Now," said the vagabond lad, "you shall have them! But you must untie me, so that I may take you to the right place."

"Where is it?"

"Two hundred paces from here. We have only to follow the sand-hills to the cutting. You must stand back a little, while I screech like an owl; they will at once come out from their hole, and then you can fire upon them as you would upon a lot of rabbits."

"Very well; I will unfasten you, but I shall hold on to you," said the notary, taking hold of the end of the rope with which he had tied the young scamp to the post.

"I don't care, so long as they're all to be killed," said the young tramp, with a savage laugh. "You'll kill them all, won't you?"

"There is one whom I wish to take alive," said M. Allanic.

The walk to the sand hills was very cautiously taken by the notary. He had tied the young vagabond by the belt, and he held on to him as though

he had been a poodle taking an airing. Cassonade hovered about at the rear of the little party, and was wild with delight at the prospect of falling upon the smugglers at last. The ex-grocer must have had the making of a soldier in him, for he behaved like a war-horse at the sound of a trumpet. The notary, who was as brave, but more cautious, watched him stealthily, and wondered what he should do to suppress this dangerous ardour.

"Promise me not to attack them till I tell you to do so," he whispered to his warlike comrade.

"Don't be alarmed," replied Cassonade, "I will behave beautifully; but before we meet these scoundrels, I must tell you there is one thing troubling me."

"What is that?"

"Well, in reality two things vex me. In the first place, to hear you say that you wish to take Bousenna alive. It seems to me that he ought not to be spared."

"Oh! I should not mourn for him if he were killed at once," laughed M. Allanic; "but I don't think that such a scoundrel as he is ought to be killed by respectable people like ourselves; I should prefer to see him die on the public place of execution at Vannes."

"He deserves it."

"Besides, he may confess several things when we have him in prison; in the first place, he may confess what he has done with Monsieur Paul Vernier's fortune, which he undoubtedly stole."

"Well, you may be right, but it also troubles me that my master, Monsieur Cambremer, isn't with us."

"He is of more use to us than you think."

"What! over there in the castle? He must be dying of impatience, and he may come to harm, besides."

"He has his share of the danger, it is true, but he is brave and courageous enough to do without our help."

"Yes, if he is not tricked by the ghosts," said the boy, who had not lost a word of the conversation.

"What do you mean by that, you young scamp?"

"I know what I mean; they've driven strangers away from the château two or three times before; they rattle chains and wrap themselves in sheets to scare people off."

"My master isn't superstitious," exclaimed Cassonade, "and he would take the ghosts by the throat if they ventured to annoy him."

"Oh! they can't be caught, and they might lead him to a hole where he would fall in and break his neck."

The notary could not help smiling at this reminder of the chevalier's nickname, although it was no time for mirth.

"That is what happened to a magistrate from Nantes, who undertook to pass the night at Suscinio," said the boy, with a laugh.

"Enough of all this," rejoined M. Allanic, who did not expect any good result from all this talk; "we are approaching the cutting, and we must keep quiet."

"What do you wish me to do?" said Cassonade.

"It is very simple. We will quietly place ourselves at the edge of the cutting, and try to see without being seen. If they are not too numerous we will tell the boy to give the signal. They will then run towards the beach, and I'll fire on them."

"But what if we have to deal with a dozen of these rascals?"

"Then we won't stir, and the lad shall not make a sound. Their brig is lost, and there is no longer any danger of their making their escape by sea. When they feel tired of waiting they will return to Suscinio, and in that case we shall have strong measures."

"What measures do you mean?"

"I shall leave you to watch before the door of the château, and I will go to the mayor of Suscinio, who is a friend of mine, and tell him everything; and he will send all the police and all the custom-house officers in the district to besiege the gang in their fortress."

"That is a good idea, certainly; but it would be better to manage our affairs ourselves."

"That is my own opinion; but what can we do? We must manage as best we can. Provided we catch them, no matter how, that is all I ask."

"I agree with you."

This declaration was followed by a spell of silence.

They were not more than twenty paces from the cutting among the sand-hills which has been referred to. The smugglers were evidently waiting in this deep gorge for the best chance of reaching their brig, for the light of their lanterns lit up the sky around. M. Allanic, renewing the manœuvre of which he had already made use at the point, made a sign to Cassonade to follow him stealthily, and took the lad by the neck, so that he would be able to strangle him at the first suspicious movement. Then he went quietly towards the verge of the cutting where a strange sight was awaiting them.

Beneath them, and in the middle of the cutting, a large coffin covered with a black pall, on which there were representations of tears in silver foil, was lighted up by four lanterns fixed to four staves which were partially imbedded in the ground. This display was so carefully arranged, and the smugglers had so scrupulously imitated the usual funeral arrangements in that part of the country that a passer-by who came upon them unawares would have been entirely deceived. The sight was enough to frighten all the countryfolks for thirty miles round; and even the custom-house officers, although naturally incredulous, would have hesitated to pass near it.

The lugubrious exhibition was not watched over by anybody, at least, apparently; although it might be supposed that Bousenna and his gang were not far off. It might, indeed, be readily surmised that they were waiting for the signal from the shore, and that the false coffin was intended to bar the way of all those whom curiosity might impel to watch their movements. Be this as it might, the two friends vainly looked about them; they could not see a human being. The lower part of the cutting was, however, lighted up by the lanterns around the catafalco, while the top of the sand-hills remained in the shade. This was favourable for a night-watch.

The lad did not show any disposition to resort to treachery, and M. Allanic, who was watching him, saw that he was behaving himself. Cassonade, it must be confessed, had been startled at sight of this funeral pomp in the midst of a storm, and was obliged to collect his wits in order not to feel impressed by the weird spectacle; he succeeded in doing so, and then waited unflinchingly for the notary to act.

The latter was now looking towards the sea. The tempest was not yet at an end; but, for a moment past, there had been what the sailors call a lull, inasmuch as that the wind had fallen a little, and the sky was clearing here and there.

M. Allanic thought that he saw a dark spot amid the waves which might be old Leguern's boat. "Come on, you young scamp! do your screeching," he said, in the little vagabond's ear.

The cry of the screech-owl immediately arose amid the silence of the night. Allanic and Cassonade, it is needless to say, waited for the effect of this cry with the utmost anxiety. As soon as the cry of the owl had risen above the wind, the two friends stretched out their necks, and, with their guns ready, and listening eagerly, they remained as though about to fire.

They had instinctively taken different duties upon themselves. The notary looked towards the sea, where he thought that he had seen Leguern's boat, while the grocer gazed down into the cutting which lay immediately below him. Nothing stirred at first—or rather the high-set lights surrounding the catafalco quivered in the wind, and the dark pall rustled, but no human form appeared.

It seemed as though the funeral preparations had been made for a genuine corpse, ready to be consigned to its last abode, and left for some strange reason or other by the relatives on the highway.

A moment passed thus, which seemed an age to Chevalier Casse-Cou's friends. Presently, and all at once, a prolonged cry like that of a bird rose from the beach. It exactly imitated the screech of the owl which was formerly the Chouans' signal. The imitation, too, was so perfect that any one might have been deceived, and M. Allanic wondered for an instant whether the cry of the lad whom he still held by the collar had not awakened some screech-owl on the sand-hills. He looked at his prisoner, and the latter, without the slightest hesitation, again uttered his cry, prolonging the sound in a peculiar manner.

This time the effect was not long in being manifest. A form appeared upon the shore, indistinct at first, then clearer. It seemed like a shadow emerging from below a sand-hill, and lengthening little by little. The person in question had evidently been lying in a rut, and had risen up at the call. A second phantom soon appeared beside the first one, and these two human figures remained motionless.

The notary had been careful to stoop down at the first cry raised by the lad, and Cassonade, ever on the alert, had done the same. The result was, that, owing to their respective positions, the smugglers could not see the two friends, bent down as the latter were to the ground, whereas our heroes could see the bandits distinctly as they stood upon the sandy shore.

M. Allanic had not considered it fit to show himself as yet. He thought that the vanguard only had appeared, and did not wish to make any sign till he had seen more. But, to his great surprise, there was not the slightest movement in the cutting. It was, however, impossible that the chariot could have been brought there by two men only, and now was the time to look out for some trick.

While the notary was reflecting as to the eventualities which might put his strategical talents to the proof, a voice was suddenly heard coming from the beach. The two men had been confabulating, and in such a way as to leave no doubt as to their identity. "Where are you, little chap?" called out a hoarse voice.

The lad was about to reply, when M. Allanic put his hand upon his mouth. A silence of a few seconds' duration ensued, and the notary profited by it to examine the black spot which he thought he saw at sea. It had grown larger, but the night was too dark to enable him to tell

whether it was a boat or merely some jutting rock protruding above the waves.

"If it is you, come forward, devil take you!" repeated the hoarse voice.

The moment was a decisive one. To prolong the silence imposed upon the young vagabond possibly meant arousing the suspicions of the smugglers, who might at once fly, and make off in the darkness. To attack them immediately also meant running the risk of falling into the midst of a band, too numerous to be mastered.

The danger suggested a stratagem to M. Allanic. "Imitate me," said he, in a low tone to Cassonade, "and make as much noise as you possibly can."

"I understand," muttered the squire.

"Must I come after you, you young toad?" howled the man on the beach, furious at not receiving any reply.

The notary took upon himself to answer. He rose at the same moment with Cassonade, and began to call out in a voice of thunder: "Surrender, or you are dead men!"

And almost immediately he called out in four different directions: "Come forward there! Attack the cutting! Come forward reserve! Bar the way on the side of the road!"

The lawyer could not have made more noise if he had had an entire battalion under his orders. But he did not rely exclusively upon such intimidation as the shouting out of military commands. He wished to profit by the disorder that the noise might create in the enemy's ranks to make an attack as sudden as impetuous. The result did not come up to his hopes. The two individuals who had appeared began to retreat, it is true; but after having retired a few steps, they turned round.

"Come, my friend, let us attack these scoundrels," said the notary to his only soldier, Cassonade.

At the same time he let go of the lad who would have interfered with his movements. The squire asked nothing better than to fight, and did not wait for the order to be repeated. However, the friends had not begun to descend the incline before there came two flashes in the darkness. Two shots went off at the same moment, and two bullets whistled past; one of them grazing M. Allanic's ear.

"Ah, the rascals!" cried Cassonade, replying by firing his gun.

He had scarcely time to take aim, and was firing almost wildly. He did not hit any one. As for the notary he had too much coolness to waste his shot, and when he sent his bullet off after careful aim, one of the shadows on the shore suddenly sunk to the ground.

Now was the time to go ahead, in order not to let the other smuggler have time to reload his gun. M. Allanic did not lose sight of this great military principle, and, accordingly, to bring matters to a successful termination, he ran towards the enemy. Cassonade did not remain behind, and the affair seemed to be turning to the advantage of the upholders of the good cause, for they were now two against one.

But at the very moment when they emerged upon the shore at the mouth of the cutting, they saw some tall black forms around the cat-falco.

"Help!" called out the smuggler who had remained standing.

The two friends saw that they would now be taken between two fires. It was no moment for hesitation, however, and M. Allanic only ran the more

swiftly towards the isolated smuggler. With one hand the notary brandished his gun, like a club, and in the other he held a pistol in readiness to fire.

Cassonade imitated him precisely, and their attack being simultaneous, might result in victory ; but at the very moment when they were about to fall both at once upon their adversary, there came a shot from behind, and the poor squire was hit by a bullet and fell.

The notary, who had not been touched, managed to evade a blow with a dagger from his adversary, and struck him upon the head with the butt of his gun. The wretch fell like an ox under a butcher's mallet, and lay writhing in the last agonies of death.

M. Allanic did not amuse himself by picking him up ; but he bent down to raise up his poor companion who lay a few yards off on the sand, which was already reddened with his blood. Unfortunately, in his charitable ardour, the notary had forgotten the smugglers in the cutting.

"Are you seriously wounded ?" he asked of Cassonade, who was groaning piteously.

"I believe my thigh is fractured," painfully articulated the squire.

"I will tie up the wound with my handkerchief, and it will be nothing," replied M. Allanic, who was far from believing his own assurances. With a forgetfulness of danger which indicated more humanity than prudence, he began to bind up his friend's wound as well as he was able ; but the rascals who had fired at him did not allow him time to complete his task.

They had profited by the respite to approach noiselessly from the rear, and before the notary could rise or even turn round, they had reached him, thrown themselves upon him, and seized him by the throat.

M. Allanic, taken by surprise, was thrown down, and before he could even attempt to defend himself, he felt the point of a knife upon his breast.

"Wait a bit," said one of the rascals to his companion, "we shall have time enough to kill him by-and-bye, and I want to find out who he is."

"You can see that when he is dead," answered the other, raising his hand to make a blow at the prisoner's heart.

"I tell you to let him alone !" said the first one, in a tone of authority ; "I wish to question him, and if you kill him now I sha'n't find out anything."

"Yes," growled the other, "and with all your precautions we may be attacked while we are gabbling away here. Those scoundrels are not alone, and the shots will bring the custom-house officers upon us."

"Let me alone ; the officers are too much afraid to come out of their holes ; and I must make this one speak, so as to know whether we should not do better to return to the château."

"You always want to postpone matters. We ought to have been at sea three days ago, and we shall end by leaving our pile and our skins here."

"What ails you, you fool ? Two of our men are dead ; and that will make us fewer to go shares."

The notary did not lose a word of this edifying discourse, and if he had entertained any doubt as to the presence of Bousenna and his band, the words that he heard would have rid him of his uncertainty.

He made up his mind to die, for he felt that all resistance would be vain. His gun and pistol, which he had laid upon the sand, in order to help Cassonade, were no longer within his reach, and besides all this, a knee was pressing upon his shoulder, and two strong hands were tightened about his neck.

"Tell me your name, your rascal!" cried out the smuggler, who seemed to be the leader.

M. Allanic did not utter a sound.

"You see that we sha'n't learn anything from him," continued the other fellow.

"Help me to drag him to the cutting, so that we can look at him by the light of our lanterns."

"Well and what shall I do with the other?" said the smuggler under orders, giving Cassonade a kick.

"Oh! his account is settled; we need only leave him where he is."

While the two miscreants were exchanging these friendly remarks, the notary felt that they were tying his arms with a cord.

"Get up!" called out the chief smuggler, when he had finished the task, "and go straight ahead if you do not wish me to blow out your brains."

M. Allanic obeyed, but not without giving a compassionate glance at Cassonade, who lay upon the sand. He had the courage to refrain from bidding him farewell. It was better to leave the poor squire his last chance, by feigning to believe that he was dead. Pétronille's husband probably understood this, for he did not stir.

The spot where the engagement had taken place was but thirty paces away from the lanterns in the cutting, and the prisoner soon arrived there, pushed along by his ferocious conquerors, who did not spare him either blows or kicks.

"Climb on the Sand hill there, and see if there is any one about," at last said the leader, "and if you find the boy, bring him here, and I'll teach him to play us such tricks as this one, by putting six inches of steel into him."

While the other smuggler was obeying this order, M. Allanic was dragged by the neck to the foot of the catafalco, around which the lanterns were still burning.

"I thought so!" exclaimed the smuggler chief, when the light fell upon his prisoner's face. "So it was you, my amiable lawyer, who have been running about the roads at night-time, to prevent people from transacting their little matters of business."

The man who thus spoke wore a long cloak, the hood of which fell over his face.

"Well," he continued, "I'll profit of this occasion, and settle my long account with you, my fine notary! We are old acquaintances." And, throwing back the folds of his cloak, he showed the prisoner the odious face of the miscreant Bousenna.

M. Allanic had expected to see the Moor, and did not even utter an exclamation of surprise. With his back against the catafalco, his arms held tightly to his sides by the rope about them, but with his head high, and his look haughty, the stoical notary unflinchingly waited for death.

"Where is your pretty favourite, your chevalier who is so willing to break his neck for the sake of innocent and persecuted youth?" demanded Bousenna, with a frightful laugh.

M. Allanic did not honour him by a reply. However at this moment the smuggler who had gone to look for the lad returned. "There is no use in troubling ourselves about the boy," said he; "he has a ball in his brain. Our comrade's shot settled him."

"A good riddance!" said Bousenna, sneeringly.

"Master," resumed the other, "it is time to finish all this. I saw a boat coming up when I was over there, and it must be the long boat from the brig."

"You are right; I'll finish this fellow off, and it won't take long either. Come, you bold defender of the Porspoders, make up your mind to go to meet your friend the Lord of Kerpenhir!" And, taking a pistol from his belt, Bousenna slowly raised his arm, and placed the muzzle of the weapon upon M. Allanic's forehead.

The notary was a hero. He did not blanch. And yet he thought of his wife and children calmly awaiting him at Vannes. M. Allanic had the faith of a true Breton; he raised his soul to Heaven, and mentally offered up a prayer for all who were dear to him.

The death which he awaited did not come. Bousenna looked at him with eyes full of fierceness, but he did not show any haste to pull the trigger of the pistol which he had raised to his prisoner's head. He seemed to take pleasure in prolonging his agony.

This horrible situation had lasted for some seconds, and the notary was astonished that his implacable enemy did not hasten to despatch him. He was still more surprised when Bousenna lowered his pistol. "Only think, my dear notary," said the villain, "how easy it would be for us to come to an understanding."

"I do not understand you," replied M. Allanic, scornfully.

"It is easy enough to do so, however; if you had not chosen to play a virtuous part, and refuse to give me the deeds concerning my brother-in-law's property, I would have made your fortune, and should not be obliged to blow your brains out, as I shall do presently."

"If that is all you have to say, you may as well spare yourself useless talk."

"Come, come," resumed Bousenna, "if I content myself with keeping you in sight until you give me satisfaction, will you consent to give me a letter to your clerk, that same fellow to whom I gave such a good blow with my fist?"

"A letter?" repeated the notary, in amazement.

"Oh, I know very well that he would not give the deeds to a messenger from me; and, besides, you see, I have no time to go to a broker and effect a transfer of the property. That is not what I want."

"What do you want, then?"

"Money, of course. I have some money, as you may believe; for I have settled my affairs, and I have a neat little pile; still fifty thousand francs more would suit me exactly."

"I haven't fifty thousand francs in my safe; and if I had I would not give them to you," replied M. Allanic, firmly.

"Bah! it would be better than rotting here on the beach."

"Kill me; I am ready!"

"Come now, my dear notary, reflect a little before you make up your mind to go to another world."

"I repeat that I will not purchase my life by an act of cowardice. Besides you know very well, that what you ask is impossible."

"Why? it is often managed in Italy and Greece. I have a vaulted chamber over there at the château, where I could lodge you till my ambassador returned from Vannes with the money. We will find writing materials for you, and with six lines from you, I am sure that your wife would not make any difficulty about letting the money go."

This time the notary did not even deign to reply. The subordinate smuggler now saw fit to interfere. "Master," said he, "this is all very well ; but we shall be awful fools not to take advantage of this dark night to get on board the brig which is waiting for us. It would be better than risking the treasure and our lives, besides, for the sake of fifty thousand francs which we might not get."

"Let me alone, you fool ! The boat is coming up, and we will begin by sending the case on board. When the treasure is safe, we can very well wait for twenty-four hours in the vault where no one will come after us. Fifty thousand francs are well worth having."

"As you like, master ; but don't ask me to go on your errand to Vannes."

"Don't be afraid ; I shall send Yamina. Come, my good notary, have you made up your mind ?"

"Yes ; I refuse !"

"Once, twice—don't you mean to save your carcass ?"

"I do not wish to disgrace myself," said M. Allanic, looking his enemy full in the face.

"Well, then, die like a dog !" cried the smuggler, furiously.

He raised his weapon for the second time, but had not time to fire. A shot came from across the cutting, and Bousenna fell. In the meantime his accomplice, surprised and terrified by this unforeseen attack, fled towards the shore.

Before the notary had time to understand what had happened, he saw a man who ran up to him, and flung himself into his arms, exclaiming : "Heaven be praised that I was not too late !"

He recognised Cambremer, and felt such emotion at sight of him that he was unable to utter a word of thanks.

Chevalier Casse-Cou did not waste his time in useless words. He had a knife in his hand, with which he cut the prisoner's bonds. This done, he ran to the rascal who was rolling upon the sand, vomiting torrents of blood.

"Bousenna !" he cried ; "ah ! Heaven is just ! It willed that this villain should die by my hand alone !"

Baïa's persecutor was writhing in the final throes. Chevalier Casse-Cou's bullet had pierced his lungs. He also recognised Cambremer, and murmured in a voice that sounded like a death-rattle : "Yamina will avenge me !"

Then his mouth became contracted, his limbs stiffened, and he expired in a convulsion of agony.

Bousenna was dead—quite dead, and yet Cambremer could not believe that henceforth his dear little Baïa had nothing more to fear from her odious persecutor. He, Casse-Cou, remained for some moments bent over the corpse the features of which still spoke of hate and rage. He seemed to fear that the Moor would rise up and attempt some new and astounding piece of rascality.

The notary however tried to rouse his friend. He made use of his first moment of freedom to stretch his arms, which were stiff from being bound to his sides, and then he drew a long breath, like a man who has felt the terrors of death near at hand and has escaped them. Finally as soon as he had recovered himself, M. Allanic ran to his deliverer and embraced him with the warmest feeling.

"Thanks !" said he, simply ; "thanks, in the name of my wife and my children !"

These few words touched Cambremer much more than the most eloquent protestations of gratitude could have done. The embraces of the two friends were as cordial as though they had met after years of absence, and indeed, the hours of their separation might have counted as years. However, their happiness was not perfect : for Pétronille's poor husband was missing.

"But where—where is Cassonade?" stammered Chevalier Casse-Cou, who scarcely ventured to ask after his daring squire.

"Out there upon the beach, wounded, and perhaps dying," replied M. Allanic, reluctantly; he felt ashamed at having for a single instant forgotten the brave man whom the enemy's fire had struck down beside him.

"Let us go to him!" cried Cambremer; and he seized one of the lanterns which the smugglers had left beside the catafalco.

The notary seemed to hesitate. "Are you not afraid," said he, looking around, "that the rest of the gang will come out to attack us? We have killed three of them, but the others must be hidden on the hills."

"Three, did you say? then there is only one left; for they were four in all when I saw them leave the castle."

"And the survivor fled towards the shore. We mustn't lose a moment!"

And, pointing out the way to Cambremer, M. Allanic ran as fast as he could in the direction of the sea. Cassonade was soon found. The brave squire had had courage enough to drag himself towards the cutting when Cambremer's shot rang through the night. The idea that the struggle was being renewed had given him some strength, and he had succeeded in crawling as far as the entrance of the gap, moistening the sand with his blood as he went.

The notary had not gone ten steps along the shore when he ran against the wounded hero. Supported on his hands, his head up, and with his legs extended upon the ground, Cassonade looked more like a sharp shooter watching the enemy than a man incapacitated by a bullet.

The scene which followed the meeting was as cordial and as full of feeling as that between M. Allanic and Cambremer.

"Where are you wounded?" asked Chevalier Casse-Cou.

"In the thigh; but it is only a flesh-wound, there are no bones broken."

"Heaven has protected us throughout;" exclaimed the notary, kneeling down to resume the binding-up of the wound which Bousenna's attack had interrupted half an hour before.

"Thanks," said Cassonade, quietly; "that is done! I used my cravat; you must not think of me."

"Of whom ought we to think, then, my poor friend?"

"Of the rascal who fled just now when you fired. He came near treading upon me in his flight."

"Where has he gone?"

"Not far, I'll wager; and at any moment he may fall upon us."

"Oh! now that we are all here, he won't feel inclined to try it."

"Don't be too sure of that. He ran towards the sea, and through an opening I caught sight of the boat which we saw from the top of the hills."

"I remember now," said the notary, anxiously, "that Bousenna said something to his accomplice about the long boat that the brig intended to send out to them."

"The deuce he did!" said Cambremer. "We shall do well to keep on our guard."

This was undoubtedly M. Allanic's opinion also, for he hastily rose up to scan the horizon. The darkness was still very great; but, suddenly, at a few yards from him, the notary saw a man. The first movement on the part of the two friends was naturally a defensive one.

Cambremer thrust his gun forward, and M. Allanic drew a knife from his belt—the only weapon of which the smugglers had not deprived him.

"Stand where you are!" called out the chevalier to the new comer who was walking towards them.

The reply to this warning was not immediate, however the man stopped short. Before replying, he was, perhaps, anxious to find out who was speaking to him.

"Answer, or we shall fire!" added the notary by way of a final warning.

This threat had complete success. "It is a friend!" said a familiar voice.

"Leguern!" exclaimed M. Allanic.

"Yes, of course," replied the old tar, coming forth from the surrounding darkness.

"But why the deuce have you been letting off fire-crackers for this last hour?" said he

The warmest welcome naturally preceded the explanation asked for by Leguern. For five minutes there was an exchange of cordial words and joyous exclamations, in the midst of which it was difficult for the friends to tell their story.

The old salt was the first to give the conversation a more positive turn. "Do you know that I thought I should never get here?" said he. "By the ropes end! what a time I had of it, pulling away to double the point of Bocaven! Besides that, the brig belonging to those rascals almost ran me down when it drew towards the coast."

"Ah! my poor friend, I feared that you were lost!" said Cambremer.

"Bah! I've seen much worse things in the Indian seas, but never mind, it was tough! By the bye, one of the Lascars in that fellow Bousenna's pay had a dose."

"Indeed!" said M. Allanic, rubbing his hands; "I thought the brig had run on a rock, and that no one had been able to swim."

"Oh! that one did not come from the brig; he threw himself into the sea, right before your eyes."

"That must have been the man who was keeping guard over you while Bousenna was preparing to blow out your brains?" said Chevalier Casse-Cou, to the notary.

"I don't know about that," resumed Leguern; "but what I can tell you is, that he was striving very hard to come up to me. I think he took my boat for the long-boat of the brig, for he called out for help in words which I could not understand."

"Then his strength gave out?"

"Oh! no danger that I'd let him catch on. The sea was going out, and I could steer. Every time that he wanted to clutch at the side of the boat, I gave him a hit and kept him off. He got tired of it at last, and let go. When I saw that he did not come up any more, I stuck the grapple into a good sand-bank, and swam ashore."

Under any other circumstances, Allanic and Cambremer would have been

excited by this narrative ; but when a man has just risked his life he is less likely to give way to feeling.

"I think that we can return to Vannes now," said the notary, in a tone of satisfaction, "for I don't believe that there is any one left belonging to the gang."

"You are mistaken, my friend," said Cambremer ; "there is the diabolical creature whom Bousenna left at the château. She has escaped us."

"True ; in the midst of all this fighting I had forgotten to ask you what happened over there."

"I will tell you all that when we have taken our wounded man home. I shall not be at ease till we have left this accursed beach."

"You are right, and it is time to set about it. Our friend Leguern will hurry ahead to Sarzeau and bring us a litter and some bearers."

"Oh ! I shall soon return," said the old tar.

"How glad they will be at the custom-house when they know that we have rid them of those rascals !"

"I say, my friend," called out Cassonade, who had not lost a word of the talk in spite of his sufferings, "it is all very well to get a litter for me, as, otherwise, I should have to hop along on one leg ; but don't forget a cart to take away the hoard of money."

Cambremer could not but admire the practical spirit of his squire ; however, he was not a man to trouble himself about a money-box more or less, and he somewhat scornfully replied : "What do we care for the money of those rascals ?"

"I think we shall do as well to take it away with us," replied the lawyer ; "yes, I think that Leguern had better find some means of removing this sham coffin, which seems to me to be filled with valuable things."

"But none of the money belongs to us," said Cambremer.

"Don't be uneasy. I don't intend to appropriate the plunder ; indeed, I should be quite unworthy of a seat in the Chamber of Notaries if I did not give the smugglers' funds to the custom-house authorities ; but there is nothing to show that the box does not contain something besides."

"What do you mean ?"

"Why, the fortune that Bousenna stole from your young friend Vernier's father."

XV.

WHICH RECORDS THE DEATH OF THE SCORPION.

THREE weeks had elapsed, and in three weeks a deal may happen to change even the most complicated position of affairs. Paul Vernier's marriage with Martha Mongis had been decided upon, and it was agreed by one and all that it should take place in the little church of Kerpenhir, where the last of the Porspoders' property was situated. M. Allanic had declared that he would not allow the contract to be signed elsewhere than in his office, and he had so generously devoted himself to the interests of his Parisian friends that no one thought of disputing his claim to this privilege.

One bright April day the affianced lovers and all who were interested in them found themselves seated upon the short, dry grass of the moor of Carnac, in front of a delicious pic-nic repast. The notary had insisted upon making his friends visit all the curious places round about them, and

Madame Allanic had taken care to supply them with provisions enough to satisfy their appetites sharpened by three hours' walking.

The cloth had been laid at the foot of a huge block of granite, with its point embedded in the sand, and the party had before their eyes a view which did not in the least recall either the park of Saint Cloud, or the forest of Montmorency. The smooth turf and fresh green trees that charm the picnickers of the Parisian suburbs were replaced by the pale broom and grey stones of the most celebrated of all the Druids' sanctuaries. Long avenues of "menhirs," the rough Celtic obelisks, extended far out of sight, like the interminable rows of sphinxes in front of the temples of Upper Egypt.

This remark is made advisedly, it should be mentioned, for the analogy between the two civilizations is striking; there are the same shapeless masses and the same mysterious arrangement of primitive monuments. The sky alone differs, and the sun which gilds the temples of Loosor is utterly wanting in old Armorica.

The sea-breeze that day was bending the broom, and sighing in a mournful way over the sandhills; however, M. Allanic's guests did not care for the dullness of the weather. Paul and Martha were too happy to think of the grey clouds hovering above the peninsula, and nature vainly veiled her face; they saw her with the eyes of happy youth.

The two mothers rejoiced in the happiness of their children, and Baïa played light-heartedly with the notary's little daughters. As for M. Allanic and his inseparable friend, Francis Cambremer, they were enjoying their own work and never tired of contemplating the pleasing picture before them.

The party was complete, for old Leguern and Cassonade had places in the feast. The ex-grocer's wound had closed, and had been followed by no worse result than forcing him for a time to walk with crutches. This annoyance, however, had not impaired his good humour, and he always had a joke at hand.

The repast was about to end, when M. Allanic proposed that they should take a walk among the "druidical alleys" before returning to Kerpenhir.

"Come, my dear Francis," said he to Chevalier Casse-Cou, "I wish to convince you that there is nothing in Greece so curious as the Carnac stones."

Cambremer took his friend's arm, and they went off, talking as they walked; while the women and children amused themselves with gathering the white daisies and red heather of the plain. The lovers had contrived to lag behind, and at the foot of some of the dark stones which had formerly been reddened by human sacrifices, they exchanged the tender words that are spoken by those who love when they are young.

Cassonade also had lingered behind with the wine-bottles, and was attacking the broken crust of a good-sized pie for the last time. Leguern, who was but little interested in druidical monuments, was making ready to depart.

"Well, my friend," said M. Allanic to the chevalier, "I told you that everything would be settled. The director-general's letter came yesterday, and the administration admit that three hundred thousand francs of the smugglers' money belong to M. Vernier. Our young friend can begin house-keeping with fifteen thousand francs a year."

"He will owe the income to you, my dear Allanic, just as Baïa owes you her name and inheritance."

"Oh! you have contributed not a little to our success; and without your

miraculous intervention that night our entire plan would have fallen through, without counting that the best practice in Vannes would have gone a-begging. I wonder, indeed, that you managed to escape the trap laid for you by that diabolical Yamina."

"It is she who has escaped me, in point of fact," replied Cambremer, "and so long as she is not arrested, I shall not feel at ease."

"Bah! she must be far off by this time, and she won't be likely to return to Brittany. Besides, she believes that she killed you by the shot that she fired from the top of the tower."

"That may be, for I met no one in the castle when I succeeded in getting down by dint of struggling and beating in the door of the platform; that's what I had to do to escape. However, you may be sure that that woman will try to avenge Bousenna."

"What can she do to harm us?" said M. Allanic. "Without the help of the men who were her accomplices, and without any money, it would be difficult for her to attempt a new attack. You may be sure, my friend, that she has gone back to Paris, which will always be the refuge of women like herself."

"Much good may it do her!" said Cambremer. "We sha'n't go there to look after her."

"Then you have made up your mind to stay with us?" said the notary, smiling. "I did not venture to believe that our poor country would tempt you."

"Why not? Am I not a Breton myself? Besides, I will confess that our dear little Baïa is now the only being who remains to give an interest to my life, and I have resolved to remain with her, and never to leave her more."

"The daughter of my old friend Porspoder owes it to the name she bears to live in our province. You know that I have great plans for her. We must begin by rebuilding Porspoder properly, so that the richest heiress in Morbihan may live as she ought to do, and then in six or seven years' time, we must find a husband for her. My good Alliette is already thinking of finding a suitable match for her among our old families."

"And in the meantime we shall go to the wedding of the two young people over there," resumed Cambremer, pointing to Martha, who was leaning upon the arm of her betrothed. "If Paul's mother could make up her mind to stay here, too, our happiness would be complete."

"I trust that she will do so. My wife has urged her to make up her mind to it, and she has almost consented. There is nothing to keep Madame Vernier at Saint Omer, except the management of her little property at La Roche, and if she will sell it, I know of a very desirable house and grounds near Vannes, which would be the very thing for the young couple."

"I shall divide my time between those excellent friends and yourself and family, who are also dear to me."

"And Cassonade would make a very desirable steward for Baïa's estate."

After this last suggestion a spell of silence followed. Chevalier Casse-Cou had begun to reflect somewhat sadly. He said to himself with some apprehension that the past was not calculated to inspire him with much confidence in the future. He knew by experience that perfect happiness is not of this world, and he felt too happy not to fear a change.

"These are dreams, my friend," he answered, with a sigh: "and I cannot believe in them."

"Bah! Heaven is just, and we have been severely tried of late," said the

notary. "The evil days are over—well over, and you will see that all will end as in a fairy tale. Prince Charming will marry the princess; they will be happy, so will we; they will have a great many children—I have three already. Why shouldn't you marry, also? We have some young ladies about here who are as well endowed by their parents as by nature, and really now—"

"I shall never marry," interrupted Cambremer, who could not help smiling at the finale proposed by the warm-hearted lawyer. "I don't wish to have any other family than your own, or any child but dear Baïa."

"We shall manage to change your mind," said Allanic, in a gay tone.

"I do not believe it, and I will admit to you that I sometimes have sad forebodings."

"It is the bad weather, and I admit that the contemplation of Druidical monuments is not enlivening, by any means. Do you care to go to the end of the row? When you have seen one 'menhir,' you have seen all of them, and I should say that we might as well join the ladies."

"I am quite willing to do so, for every time that Baïa is out of my sight I imagine that she will be carried away."

"Oh, kidnapping cannot be managed here as it is managed in the Paris streets. But there is nothing to prevent you from going at once to give her a kiss."

"I do not see her anywhere about," said Cambremer, uneasily.

While talking the two friends had walked on some distance, and the rest of the party had remained far off in the rear.

"Let us look back," said M. Allanic, putting up his hand to shade his eyes; "I have an eye like a sailor, and I can tell you where the little one is. There are my little girls running about like young colts; the three mammas are behind them, and seem to be talking very busily; Cassonade is in the rear, crutches and all, and Leguern is busy over there stowing away the breakfast. Only the young couple are out of sight."

"But where is Baïa? It is she whom I am anxious about."

"Martha must have taken her with her, of course. You see, my dear friend, although she is engaged, she must have some one with her besides Paul."

"Let us hurry back!" rejoined Cambremer, more and more anxiously.

The stone with which the moor was covered rose up in several parallel files. There were avenues of stones, so to speak, and from the one along which the two friends were walking, one could only espy a portion of the granite forest. They went quickly back, and after a few moments M. Allanic exclaimed: "Oh! don't be alarmed! I see the young folks and the dear child is with them."

"Heaven be praised!" said Cambremer, with a deep sigh of relief.

"But what in the world are they doing at the foot of that huge 'menhir'? Has Paul suddenly taken a fancy to Armorican antiquities? That is very unlikely for a man in love!"

"They seem to be talking to some one. Who can it be?"

"Let us make haste!" said Allanic.

Cambremer was too impatient to lag behind, and the two friends hastened on as fast as they could walk.

"Yes, I see now! It is a woman that Paul is speaking with."

"It must be some beggar. There are a great many about here," said the notary.

He, perhaps, felt less sure of this than he wished to appear: for he now

began to run. They had not gone many yards further when they saw that they must make still greater haste. The young couple were gesticulating with strange earnestness, and Baïa was clinging to Martha with unmistakable signs of fright.

This was going on at the foot of a huge block of stone, and the ladies who were slowly approaching at the end of the avenue could not see what was passing. The woman, whose words were, seemingly, thus causing the lovers' alarm, was wrapped in a long grey cloak, and leaned upon a crutch, according to the invariable custom of highway beggars.

"It must be old Yvonne from Carnac, who is always prowling about here to get strangers to give her money," said M. Allanic.

"I think you are mistaken," replied Cambremer, curtly. "Martha would have given alms to any genuine beggar at once."

"Well, we shall see."

They were but a few paces from the menhir now; but the beggar had her back to the friends, and her face was invisible. Suddenly, however, they saw her draw up her figure to its full height, throw away her stick, and rush towards Martha, with her arm raised.

"Ah! I thought it was she!" exclaimed Cambremer, bounding forward like a lion.

Martha had had the presence of mind to throw herself back, and thus avoided the first attack. Paul had thrown himself before the daring creature, but she had pushed him aside, and still pursued his betrothed.

Baïa, however, found herself in her way, and her fury was now turned upon the poor little child. She bent down to take hold of her, but just as she was about to do so, Cambremer came upon her like lightning.

It was but the work of a second for Chevalier Casse-Cou to seize hold of the beggar and bring both her arms back against her body. A howl of rage broke from her. The fiendish creature struggled to free herself; but he held on, and soon felt that she was giving way. When, at last, he let go of her, she fell back.

Scarcely had she done so, than Cambremer knelt down beside her, to prevent her from getting up. The hood with which her head had been covered had fallen back, and now her face was visible.

"Yamina!"

This cry was raised by both the chevalier and Allanic, who had now come up.

"Take hold of her, and tie her hand with your handkerchief!" cried the ever-prudent notary.

"It is useless to do so," said Cambremer, pointing to the distorted features of the evil creature. "She is dead!"

"Dead! don't let us be sure of that," said M. Allanic, kneeling beside his friend to help him to bind Yamina's arm.

"Look!" said Chevalier Casse-Cou.

A pin was imbedded in the wretched woman's cheek, and a bluish circle already surrounded the almost imperceptible wound that it had made. The notary, who had never witnessed the effects of curare, could not understand this instantaneous death.

"Heaven is just!" exclaimed Cambremer; "she has been killed by the same poison that killed Baïa's mother."

"Ah! I understand it all now," exclaimed M. Allanic; "she threw herself upon Martha, with the pin in her hand, and when you seized her by

the wrist she accidentally wounded herself with the pin." And he added : "It is thus that scorpions die—they bite themselves !"

The two friends now turned to the lovers.

Martha had fainted away, and Baia was kissing her and uttering wild cries of grief, while Paul pressed her hands and called for help.

The ladies ran to him, and the young girl presently revived. Cambremer, who wished to spare her the sight of the disfigured corpse, took the dead woman in his arms and carried her to the carriage which Leguern had now got ready. They at once started for Kerpenhir. Every one wished to get away from the mournful spot, and M. Allanie made haste to report the death to the authorities. His existence of late had been enlivened with more emotion in the way of fighting and murder than was altogether agreeable to him. Nothing unpleasant resulted, however, from this last episode ; his good character was too well established from Brest to Rennes, for any improper suspicion to fall on him or his friends.

Two weeks after the scene amid the Carnac stones he had the pleasure of drawing up the marriage contract of M. Paul Vernier and Mademoiselle Martha Mongis.

Seven years later, Baia de Porspoder married the heir of one of the oldest families in Brittany. She is now a widow, and the eldest of her sons was wounded on the battlefield of Coulmiers, fighting for his country against the German invaders. Francis Cambremer, who insisted upon going through the campaign, although then seventy years of age, was killed in bringing him from under the enemy's fire.

Cassonade, however, is still alive, and will end his days at Kerpenhir, where he has been steward ever since 1832 ; but his wife, poor Pétronille ! died while in Madame Paul Vernier's service.

Nowadays there is a talk of a marriage between the younger members of the two families formerly persecuted by the fiendish Bousenna.

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